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***Fresh
Every
Hour***

FRESH EVERY HOUR

DETAILING *the* Adventures, Comic and Pathetic of one **Jimmy Martin**, Purveyor of Publicity, a Young Gentleman Possessing Sublime Nerve, *Whimsical* Imagination, *Colossal* Impudence, and, Withal, *the* Heart of a Child.

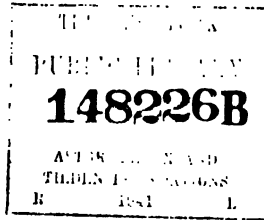
By **JOHN PETER TOOHEY**



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II

TO
MY MOTHER

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FRESH EVERY HOUR

Chapter One



JIMMY MARTIN'S heart persisted in acting like the well-known eyes of the young lady in the song. He just couldn't make it behave. Up to the third week of his summer season as press agent at Jollyland, the big summer amusement park near New York, it had always been a fairly well-mannered and dependable organ which performed its physiological functions with becoming regularity and which was not accustomed to respond to any external stimuli with anything beyond an occasional slight flutter. To be sure it had acted up a little three years back in connection with a certain dark-eyed beauty who presided over the destinies of the cigar counter up in the Grand Hotel in New Haven, but that had only been a slight attack and it had resumed the even tenor of its ways after a brief interval and had been unobtrusively going through with its routine activities ever since.

Fresh Every Hour

A most prepossessing young person whose parents had inflicted upon her the name of Lolita Murphy was directly responsible for the alarming symptoms already hinted at. From the precise moment that Lolita came within his ken Jimmy ceased to be a rational being in full control of his faculties and his heart, in sympathetic accord with the agitated condition of its owner, began to put on an antic disposition and indulged in curious palpitations of a most annoying nature on the slightest pretext. The usual provocation at first was the sight of Lolita herself, but after a day or two even the thought of her produced a cardiac ratiplan that would have done credit to the trap drummer of a jazz band.

Lolita, it may be mentioned in passing, lived up to all the implications of the somewhat picturesque cognomen given her by McClintock, the park manager, when Jimmy first pointed her out to his superior.

"She sure is Miss Lulu Looker," McClintock had remarked emphatically.

Lolita was all of that and a little more. Jimmy was not a poet and he was therefore unable to properly voice the feelings he had about her beauty. Had he been one he might have justly said that her cheeks seemed to have been kissed by the rosy flush of dawn; that in her sable eyes there lurked the eternal mystery of night beneath tropic skies; that her dark hair was as fragrant as the spices of Araby and that her lithe figure had all the gracile curves of a bounding antelope. As it was he con-

Fresh Every Hour

tented himself with the frequent repetition of the decidedly unpoetic expression "some gal," but this represented to him all the ideas noted above and a liberal assortment of others equally glamorous.

Lolita hailed from Cedar Rapids, Ia., and ever since the memorable occasion when Maude Adams played "Peter Pan" in that city for "one night only" she had cherished a great and overwhelming ambition. Her father ran the drug store next door to the Opera House and was a great crony of the manager. A number of boys and girls were picked up in each town to play the children in the Never Never Land scene and Lolita's fond parent had persuaded the manager to select her as one of the group. It was a step that father was to regret vainly for many years, but on the night of her debut he was blissfully unconscious of the possibility of any bitter repining in the future and enjoyed the proceedings almost as much as Lolita did.

From that time on Lolita felt the call of the footlights and became convinced that, given the proper opportunities for the externalization of the emotional feelings that lay dormant within her, she was destined to become an international celebrity and the queen regnant of the English speaking stage. Chauncey Olcott came to town a few weeks later and she persuaded father to work her in as one of the youngsters to whom he sang a lullaby in a high tenor voice down in the "glen" which is always the setting for the third act of an Irish play. After that there was no holding her.

Fresh Every Hour

She became a student of Miss Amanda Holliday's School of Dramatic Expression which occupied three rooms on the second floor of the Turner block on Main Street and she participated in the semi-annual entertainments given by the budding geniuses who were under the tutelage of that small town preceptress of the arts. Versatility was her middle name. At one time she would play Ophelia in the mad scene from "Hamlet" and appear later on the program in a Spanish dance with castanets, a lace mantilla and all the other necessary properties. Six months later she would combine the balcony scene from "Romeo and Juliet" with an imitation of an imitation of Eddie Foy she had heard given by a monologue artist at the Orpheum Theatre. At the age of nineteen she was the town wonder. The dramatic editor of the Democrat-Chronicle predicted that within a short time "this talented daughter of our esteemed fellow townsman Henry P. Murphy seems destined to occupy one of the stellar places in the front ranks of the worth-while artists of our fair country."

Lolita moved on to New York armed with a letter of commendation from Miss Amanda Holliday setting forth that she was "worthy of any role no matter what its importance" and urging theatrical managers "not to neglect this opportunity of obtaining the services of one who is a mistress of the mimetic art in all its manifold manifestations." She also carried a full set of clippings from the Democrat-Chronicle, one half of her male parent's at-

Fresh Every Hour

tenuated account in the First National Bank and an over-abundant supply of cheery optimism.

The metropolitan managers' office boys were decidedly cold to the advances of this gifted daughter of the Middle West. They treated her with that air of careless indifference so characteristic of their profession. With one accord all the big and little producers decided to take a big chance and neglect the opportunity which fate was offering them. They were unmoved by the clippings from the Democrat-Chronicle with which Lolita bombarded them through the mails and they were callous to the eulogistic outpourings of Miss Amanda Holliday, copies of which accompanied each written request for an interview. Lolita's cash reserve grew perilously low and disaster threatened. Then, on a morning when disillusionment and despair moved in and took lodgings in her soul, she saw an advertisement in a newspaper which was like a life buoy tossed to a drowning man.

"Ambitious Young Women Wanted for Stage Work," it read. "Opportunity Afforded Ambitious Amateurs to Perfect Themselves in Dramatic Technique—Apply Immediately at Manager's Office, 'Jollyland.'"

Lolita, filled with high hopes, took a trolley to the great playground by the sea. There destiny handed her one of those cold douches that are sometimes held in reserve for those whose ambitions o'erleap themselves. The dramatic oppor-

Fresh Every Hour

tunity promised in the advertisement proved to be what might be vulgarly termed a "job."

A great free open-air spectacle was in process of preparation at Jollyland under the supervision of a famous moving picture director who specialized in that form of animated art technically known as "serials." He had personally conducted a gazelle-eyed cinema celebrity known as June Delight through four fifteen reel affairs of this sort in which she had been threatened with mayhem, aggravated assault and battery, felonious wounding, and total and complete annihilation at the hands of numerous bands of cut-throats, bandits, thieves and white slavers. In the course of these proceedings she had performed every breath-catching feat that the festive imagination of the director had been capable of conjuring up and had succeeded, by a miracle, in keeping out of both the hospital and the obituary columns of the daily press.

Now it was proposed to let the public have a close-up view of this death-defying marvel in the flesh in the act of performing one of her most famous exploits "before your very eyes and for your attention," as the circus announcer would put it. To permit of this the director had evolved something which he called a "dramatic spectacle" and had persuaded the management of Jollyland to arrange for its production in a huge, specially constructed open-air auditorium as a "special added attraction" intended to put a final quietus on the presumptuous efforts of a rival group of showmen

Fresh Every Hour

who were endeavoring to arouse interest in a new park just opened that summer.

Lolita found herself in a long line of applicants, many of whom were pathetically peaked and undernourished looking, and when her turn came to meet the director she made up her mind to pocket her pride and accept whatever fate offered rather than run the risk of finding herself in like straits. Ambition still fired her soul and she was determined not to return to the little old home town until she could enter it in something at least closely akin to a spirit of triumph. To be sure the opportunity offered her was not particularly roseate. It did not hold forth much promise of either pecuniary reward or even of passing fame, but it meant that Lolita would not have to telegraph home for funds and there was a faint glimmer of hope in a remark made by the director.

"You can mingle in the front ranks of the crowd," he said. "We'll pay you eighteen a week. There'll only be two shows a day." Then he had looked at her critically. "You're almost a ringer for Miss Delight," he continued. "Maybe, if you're a good little girl I might take a notion to try you out as understudy."

So Lolita Murphy, the pride of Cedar Rapids, became a small and almost infinitesimal part of the great out-door spectacle entitled "Secret Service Sallie" which was the big sensation of the Jollyland season.

Fresh Every Hour

In the role of an agent of the United States secret service the charming and fascinating June Delight was swept through a series of thrilling adventures set against spectacular backgrounds depicting scenes in Berlin, Tokio, Rio de Janeiro and other world capitals and as a culminating feature she was pursued to the roof of a building in London by a howling mob which suspected her of being a spy in the employ of the Central Powers. She was saved from its hands, in the proverbial nick of time, by her fiancé, dashing Lieutenant Thurston Turner, Commander of the U. S. Dirigible N-24, who happened to be cruising about the neighborhood at the moment and who effected a rescue by circling his ship around the roof and deftly lifting the young woman into the shelter of the gondola which hung from the great gas balloon just as she was about to be beaten to death by the infuriated crowd.

Inasmuch as the spectacle was given in the open air, it was possible to use for the purposes of this scene a real dirigible which was manned by a crew commanded by one Bobby Wilkins, a personable young gentleman from Chicago who had come back from France with a major's commission, a reputation for dare-deviltry as an aviator surpassed by no other ace in the American service and a collection of a half dozen assorted war medals bestowed by three grateful nations. Bobby had left a snug berth as "assistant to the president" of a big varnish company to go into the army, the said president be-

Fresh Every Hour

ing a somewhat indulgent parent who had sanguine expectations concerning his son's commercial and industrial future and who was even now sending him daily wires to the Ritz urging him to "cut the carabets and get down to a solid rock foundation." Father labored under the delusion that Bobby was simply vacationing in New York. Had he had an inkling of just what his son was doing he would have (to use the young major's own expression) "tried for a new altitude record himself." He could hardly be expected to know that dictating fool business letters and checking up the new efficiency expert's monthly report of economies effected at the Dayton plant wouldn't exactly appeal any more to an adventuresome young man who had been skyhooting through the upper reaches of the atmosphere for nearly two years and dodging German machine gun bullets.

Bobby had overheard the general who commanded the aviation camp at which he was demobilized remarking about a request made by the moving picture director that he recommend some aviator for the task of piloting the dirigible which was to play such an important role in the spectacle and he had offered himself for the sacrifice just as a lark. He found the experience rare sport and until something giving greater promise of adventure appeared in the offing he was determined to go on with it. Twice a day he reached down and plucked up the beautiful Miss Delight as lightly as if she were a fragile doll while the assembled

Fresh Every Hour

thousands, on the qui vive with excitement, burst into rapturous applause. In order to insure the peace of mind of Robert Wilkins, Sr., Jimmy Martin had consented, rather reluctantly it must be admitted, to respect the wishes of the impersonator of Lieut. Thurston Turner, U. S. N., who had expressed a desire to remain incognito. Otherwise the consequences might have been lurid.

Jimmy itched to give out a story concerning the social and business connections of the young soldier, but he had given his word, and being an ex-newspaper man, that was sacred. He temporarily forgot about Bobby and devoted his spare moments to figuring out ways and means for the sensational exploitation of Lolita Murphy to whose charms he had become a shackled slave from the moment he first glimpsed her at rehearsal. Lolita, it may be mentioned in passing, was a trifle discouraged at the comparatively slight opportunities for uplifting and otherwise ennobling the American stage offered by her participation in "Secret Service Sallie." Her name wasn't even mentioned on the program. She figured under an impersonal heading at the bottom, together with a couple of hundred other young women who were listed as "Berlin citizens, Japanese geisha girls, South Americans, Londoners, etc., etc."

It needed all the soaring optimism of Jimmy to keep her from slipping into a nervous decline. The press agent had obtained an introduction through the stage director and his sympathetic interest in

Fresh Every Hour

her temporarily side-tracked ambitions had won him her esteem and high regard from the beginning. Jimmy was a rapid worker and within three days from the time of their first meeting he had vowed his ardent and palpitating devotion, and while Lolita had not completely committed herself to a reciprocal affirmation she had succeeded, nevertheless, by devious and subtle devices not unknown to her sex, in conveying the distinct impression that the star of hope was visible in the eastern sky.

It might be parenthetically recorded that Jimmy was accustomed to arriving at his destination when once he embarked on a journey. He had been kidnapped from an assistant sporting editor's desk on a middle western paper by a small circus, while still young, and for seven years he had been touring these United States ahead of an infinite variety of attractions ranging all the way from Curran's Colossal Carnival company (playing state fairs) to the more or less splendiferous "revues" which have their origin and their brief span of popularity along the middle reaches of Broadway.

Being more familiar with the batting averages of the best ten players in the American League than with George Henry Lewes', "The Art of Acting," and being utterly incapable of writing a didactic essay on "The Psychology of Laughter", Jimmy had never been cast for one of the so-called "kid-glove jobs" in the realm of theatrical publicity, that being the name given to the positions held by the literati who seek and occasionally obtain publicity

Fresh Every Hour

for the high-brow drama. He was not of the chosen company of the sleek and self-satisfied elect. Elegantly written stories and gracefully worded little pieces, supposedly composed by charming feminine stars, meant nothing in his young and energetic life. "Stunts" were what he specialized in, the creation of news that was so unusual, so bizarre, so full of human interest that the newspapers not only felt obliged to print it, but usually assigned their own reporters to write it up. He wasn't dignified; his conversation reeked with slang and his methods sometimes offended against all the established canons of good taste, but he sometimes landed with one foot and not infrequently with both.

His summer engagement at Jollyland was a "fill-in" between seasons and when he entered upon it he had no notion that it would shortly become pregnant with possibilities of a most disturbing sort. He had no idea that he would presently be directing all of his energies to assuaging the anxieties and soothing the troubled spirit of a somewhat forlorn maiden from what he was in the habit of scornfully referring to as a "hick town."

There came a night when Lolita's disappointment was past all bearing and when she sobbed out on Jimmy's shoulders a bitter protest against the fate that had driven her into believing that she was destined to be a great actress. They were sitting on the beach in the moonlight after the show and off in the murky distance the great Sandy Hook light was blinking like some monster fire-fly.

Fresh Every Hour

"Jimmy," she said, half-chokingly. "I just don't belong. I wish I was back in Cedar Rapids."

"Gosh, that's an awful wish, girlie," responded the press agent with a foolish attempt at a pleasantry which he instantly regretted.

Lolita drew away from him quickly.

"Cedar Rapids is all right," she retorted. "It's better than this lonesome place." She lapsed almost immediately into a wistful mood. "It's just ten o'clock there now and the movies are letting out, and there's a crowd in dad's store and the fellows are treating the girls to sundaes or just plain ice cream and dad is fussing around and maybe helping out himself. I want to go back, Jimmy, I want to go back."

Jimmy squeezed her hand softly.

"Listen, girlie," he said comfortingly. "I know just how you feel—the cards ain't runnin' right and you want to quit the game, but I'm going to cut in with a clean deck and start a new deal. I'm goin' to fix things so that when you do go back for a visit to the little old home town and dear old dad, the Peerless Silver Cornet band is goin' to be down at the station and his honor the mayor is goin' to speak a few well chosen words of welcome in the presence of a cheering crowd of friends and well-wishers. Leave it to me."

Lolita laughed a little in spite of her mood.

"You're a great little jolliér, Jimmy," she said, "and I'd like to believe you, but somehow I can't. I'm a nobody, a Cedar Rapids nobody."

Fresh Every Hour

"But you're goin' to be little Miss Lolita Somebody of the well known world," he responded cheerily, "before I get through with you. I'm goin' to drop you right into the direct center of the front page of every paper in the U. S. A. from the New York Gazette to the Wyalusing, Pa., Rocket. You're goin' to make those two chaps with the whiskers on the cough drop boxes and that fat old colored dame in the pancake flour ads look like shrinkin' violets on a foggy afternoon when I finish up with you. You just wait and see."

"How long have I got to wait, Jimmy," ventured Lolita who was adrift in the realms of fancy, carried thence by the soothing cadences of Jimmy's voice.

"Only until some afternoon when this June Delight person fails to show up,—I hear she's talkin' of layin' off for a few days. If you'll promise not to even talk about it in your sleep I'll hand you a little advance information."

Only the silent stars and the discreet moon shared Jimmy's confidence with Lolita. Its general tone and tenor lifted that despairing daughter of the plains out of the rut of hopeless striving into which she felt she had fallen and filled her with such anticipatory delight that when she said good-bye at the door of her boarding house she impulsively reached forward and kissed him full on the mouth.

"You're a darling," she murmured.

"I'll take an encore on that, girlie," he replied.
And he did.

Chapter Two

Miss June Delight summoned Manager McClintock to her dressing room just before the Saturday night performance and successfully simulated the classic symptoms of impending nervous prostration while she sniffed at a vial of smelling salts and submitted to the ministrations of a tired maid who gently massaged her forehead with her finger-tips. Miss Delight, in a voice that was barely audible, informed the manager that she could not possibly endure the trying ordeal of further performances after that evening without a brief period of rest and that she was leaving for a week's stay at a sanitarium on the following morning.

McClintock gave voice to low moans and flew other signals of distress, but Miss Delight was obdurate to his more or less frenzied expostulations and remarked that while she was disturbed at having to disappoint her "dear, lovely, friendly public," she felt that her health was the prime consideration. The manager was in a surly mood when he left her to seek out the stage director.

"Who's the understudy?" he inquired.

"She calls herself Lokita Murphy," replied the director, "but I understand there's a certain party connected with the publicity department who calls her even flossier names than that."

Fresh Every Hour

"Jimmy's gal, eh?" commented the manager. "Well, she's there with the looks anyway. Has she had a rehearsal?"

"She's been through the thing roughly with the rest of the understudies, but I can have the whole troupe called for tomorrow morning, and we can run straight through. We'll get out the dirigible and go through with the rescue stunt. We mustn't fall down on that. The little lady seems to be there with the nerve, but I'd like to try it out."

Jimmy was permitted to break the news to Lolita. He met her after the performance that night and imparted the glad tidings. When he left he gave her a final word of caution.

"Keep the little old nerve up, girlie," he said earnestly, "and we'll wake up the whole country on Monday morning."

"I'll try, Jimmy," she whispered. "You're just the—well, just the dearest boy I've ever known."

On the following morning Lolita, athrill with excitement and a little nervous, assumed the title role in "Secret Service Sallie" at a rehearsal to the complete satisfaction of McClintock, the stage director and Jimmy Martin. The latter watched her with adoring eyes, and when she successfully essayed the sensational rescue scene he was moved to wild and clamorous applause which sounded a bit startling in the great empty auditorium. Under Bobby Wilkin's expert direction the big clumsy dirigible was manoeuvred around the edge of the roof and Lolita was lifted into the car by the for-

Fresh Every Hour

mer ace with such adroit ease that the whole thing seemed to be simply part of a casual everyday occurrence. When it was over Lolita had been safely landed back on earth and had received the congratulations of everyone concerned, she drew Jimmy aside and clutched at his arm for support.

"I'm ready to faint," she said weakly. "I believe I would have up on the roof when I saw that big thing coming towards me if that fellow hadn't grabbed me off so quickly."

"You need a little nap," responded Jimmy soothingly. "The worst is over and the best is yet to come. "Don't forget that young Mr. Arthur H. Opportunity has a date with you this afternoon, and that the big splash is due tomorrow morning. Now you go in and get a little sleep and I'll have a talk with my friend, the handsome lieutenant. I fixed things with him last night, but I've got to go over some details again."

A few minutes later the press agent was closeted with Bobby Wilkins in the hangar in which the dirigible was housed. The park gates had just been opened for the day and crowds of holiday merry-makers were surging through them in quest of the fifty-seven varieties of feverish and hectic entertainment which Jollyland provided for those in search of diversion.

If anyone had called Jimmy Martin a "psycho-therapist" he would have denied the soft impeachment promptly, and then asked for a dictionary and

Fresh Every Hour

an explanatory blueprint. And yet, as a direct result of a random idea which had bobbed into his active mind a few weeks before, he was unconsciously serving in that capacity for a large and ever increasing throng of metropolitan society women of varying ages who flocked to Jollyland in search of a new thrill which he had provided. The winding up of war charity work which had followed close upon the return to these shores of the larger part of the American army had turned many of these women back upon their own resources and their innate restless activity, which had found such an altruistic outlet in new channels for several years, now imperiously demanded fresh excitement, and it was this that Jimmy offered them.

On the occasion in question, Jimmy had overheard a coy young debutante who was watching a performance of "Secret Service Sallie" remark to a group of friends who accompanied her that she'd "just love to go up on the stage and mix with the crowd." That was enough for the press agent. Ten minutes later, during the intermission, he escorted the entire party behind the scenes, and, under his guidance, they participated in the London episode which concluded the show. They mingled with the crowd of supernumeraries and entered into the proceedings attendant upon the thrilling dirigible rescue with such gusto that the stage manager gave Jimmy carte blanche to encourage the idea.

It happened that in this particular party were several of the socially elect and the papers next

Fresh Every Hour

morning carried extensive stories chronicling the event coupled with the announcement that the park management would, throughout the season, be pleased to extend the privilege of participating in the entertainment to other groups who might wish to take advantage of the opportunity for this unusual form of entertainment. Society seized upon the idea voraciously and Jollyland parties gave a new filip to the summer season at all the Long Island resorts. Elderly matrons of ample girth vied with the members of the younger set in setting the pace and in many instances came again and again to become a part of the great spectacle. For the first time in its history Jollyland began to figure in the society columns of the daily press and great was the prestige which Jimmy enjoyed in McClintock's eyes as a result.

The particular luminary of the Long Island season at the moment and the prospective lion of the month of August at Newport was none other than the Hon. Betty Ashley, daughter of the second Lord Norbourne, and the most talked about young woman in English society for a period the beginnings of which antedated the war by several years. Before the great European conflagration the Hon. Betty, though then still in her early twenties, was a European celebrity. Spirited, impulsive, and headstrong by nature she had early rebelled against the ultra-conservative traditions of her family and had so thoroughly flouted convention that her name was on the tip of the tongue of everyone in the

Fresh Every Hour

tight little island. She began it by publicly slapping the face of a certain deposed kinglet who had sought refuge and a safe haven in England and whose sole offense had been a mild protestation of love made at a fashionable garden party. There had followed her sensational and entirely unarranged presentation of a petition for woman's suffrage to England's monarch himself at a formal court (an incident which sent her dignified father to his bed for two weeks); her arrest on suspicion of being implicated in a militant attempt to set fire to the parliament buildings and her subsequent acquittal after she had refused to make any defense against a damaging array of circumstantial evidence; her jilting of the Earl of Maidsley in an explanatory and derisive letter to the Times; her winning of the amateur tennis championship and a host of other incidents of a distinctly unconventional nature. Then the war had come and she had gone over to France in the first months as a motor driver and had still managed to keep in the public eye for five years despite the somewhat considerable amount of attention devoted by the newspapers to the main phases of the great struggle itself. She had, for one thing, won a D. S. O. for bravery under fire in the first battle of Ypres and she had, for another, been reprimanded in orders for organizing a ball at a certain chateau occupied by the staff of a certain corps during the absence of the commanding general at a conference at G. H. Q.

Now she had come to the United States for the

Fresh Every Hour

first time and had materially assisted in putting zest and "punch" into a round of festive house parties on Long Island given by prominent members of the swiftest moving coterie of the so-called smart set. Small wonder that when she heard of the expeditions to Jollyland which were enjoying such a vogue that she should elect to organize one herself.

"I'm not entirely a rank amateur, my dear," she confided to her hostess when the party was preparing to depart. "I went on for two nights running in the chorus at the Alhambra last winter on a five pound wager, and I'd have stuck it out for a whole week for the fun of it if the pater's blood pressure hadn't been running abnormally high. The old dear would have gone all to smash if he had found out and he might if I'd kept on."

The Hon. Betty, her dark beauty set off by a rose-pink silk sweater and a Tam o'Shanter to match, was in the first car of the string of six which disgorged a laughing crowd of merry-makers in front of Jollyland on Sunday afternoon. They made for the big arena immediately as it was within a few minutes of the advertised time for the ringing up of the curtain on the great spectacle. The Hon. Betty let it be known to an usher, who was duly impressed by her air of authority, that she craved an immediate interview with the manager. McClintock, still disturbed at the defection of the capricious Miss Delight, responded begrudgingly; was apprised of the identity and mission of the distinguished visitor and sought out Jimmy

Fresh Every Hour

Martin in great excitement. He found the press agent back on the stage.

"Say, young fellow," he said enthusiastically, "I've got a Monday morning story for you already made and ready to try on. This Betty Ashley who's been grabbing off space all over the world for a long time and who's the big noise with the real folks over here this summer, is out in front with a crowd right out of the social register, and she wants to go on in the London scene. I told her she could. Get busy now and prepare for a general assault on the helpless press."

Jimmy received this intelligence with a glumness that rather annoyed McClintock.

"What did she want to pick out today for?" he inquired uneasily.

"What's the matter with today? It's the best day possible for a good break for us. The papers are always glad of anything that makes a noise like a story on Sunday. What's the matter?"

"Oh, nothin', replied Jimmy absent-mindedly, "only I wish she'd waited until the middle of the week. I was kinda figurin' on—oh, never mind, it'll be all right."

Chapter Three

An acute observer would have detected signs of suppressed excitement in the general demeanor of Jimmy Martin during the progress of the early scenes of the great spectacle in which Lolita Murphy was essaying the leading role for the first time on any stage. He had exchanged his customary cigarette for the solace of a particularly formidable looking cigar which he puffed at nervously as he sat in the manager's box with his cap pulled down over his eyes. His whole body was tense and rigid and though there was a look of adoration in his eyes there was something more—a vague something that seemed to spell apprehension.

Justice compels the admission that Lolita was doing Cedar Rapids proud. She moved through the thrilling situations of "Secret Service Sallie" with the ease and calm assurance of a veteran and more than merited the applause which the vast holiday audience showered on her. When the curtain rose on the final scene—the one depicting the streets of London—the audience, keyed up to expectant excitement by the gaudy promises of the program—held its collective breath and Jimmy sunk his teeth viciously into what remained of his cigar. McClintock slid into the seat alongside of him.

Fresh Every Hour

"That gal of yours is sure making good," he remarked good-naturedly. "If she goes through to the finish as nicely she'll find a surprise in her envelope on Saturday night. There's that English society dame and her party strolling along just as if they were back in dear old London. I had Lawrence, the assistant stage manager, go on with 'em to put 'em wise to all the business."

The mimic street on the stage was thronged with a motley crowd of supernumeraries who were supposed to represent the populace of the British metropolis out for an airing on a bank holiday. The rose-pink sweater of the Hon. Ashley was the most conspicuous object in view. That patrician lady bobbed in and out among the others, apparently having the time of her life and urging her friends, with violent pantomime, to enter into the festivities with something akin to her own enthusiasm.

Presently the audience hear a murmur pass through the crowd on the stage and Jimmy's acute ear detected the muffled purr of the motor on the dirigible which was, at that moment, manoeuvring for position and awaiting its cue two hundred feet in the air just behind the backs of the last row of spectators. The press agent grabbed the railing in front of him and leaned eagerly forward. He was watching the right side of the stage.

A motor car shot out of the wings through a lane in the crowd. In it sat Lolita Murphy in the role of queen of the American secret service! It

Fresh Every Hour

was plain that she was simulating great anxiety and that she was being followed. She looked apprehensively over her shoulder and the audience could catch excited shouts of "stop her, stop her." A gigantic bobby stepped directly in the path ahead of the car and drew his revolver. The chauffeur pulled a lever and the car stopped abruptly. A man on a motor-cycle came dashing up.

"Arrest her," he shouted and he sprang from the saddle. "She's a German spy from the Wilhelmstrasse."

Lolita looked about furtively, poised herself for just a moment and then leaped out of the car, overturning an athletic super and making for a doorway as the crowd broke into frenzied cries of "kill her, kill her." The incident had been rehearsed with the utmost regard for actuality and as the mob surged after the suspected spy the vast throng of spectators swayed with excitement like a field of tall grass in a breeze. Lolita reached the safety of the doorway by almost the fraction of an inch and disappeared. The crowd poured in after her and McClintock caught Jimmy's arm as he detected a vanishing flash of rose-pink.

"Damned if that English dame isn't right in at the death," he said excitedly. "She's going up on the roof."

Jimmy didn't reply. He was watching the top of the make-believe building with eyes that were strained and staring. As Lolita emerged from the hatchway and plunged forward, with a fine gesture

Fresh Every Hour

of despair, he looked back over his shoulder for a moment and noted that the N-24 was slowly swinging forward and that the alert and eager face of Bobby Wilkins was visible over the edge of the car which hung from the rear of the big balloon.

Lolita held out appealing hands and gave voice to cries for assistance. The crowd, in the vanguard of which was a lady in a rose-pink sweater with cheeks that were flaming and with eyes that were dancing, swarmed up through the opening and surrounded the suspected spy. The supernumeraries' voices became a blended babble of inarticulate cries and 3467 spectators watched the developments in a tense silence.

Nearer and nearer swung the great dirigible. Lolita was now in the hands of the mob with which she struggled fiercely. As the N-24 swung around the corner of the roof she turned as per instructions, but Jimmy noticed with a gasp of concern that she had turned in the wrong direction and that she was making her way to the wrong side. She was evidently bewildered. Bobby Wilkins was leaning out of the car with his arms outstretched and was beseeching her to run toward the other side of the roof. In another five seconds the dirigible would have passed on and the spectacular finish of the big show would be ruined. McClintock swore softly. Jimmy sat as one entranced.

Some of the supers were pushing Lolita to the other side, but she seemed to be in a panic and struggled with them as if still acting the earlier

Fresh Every Hour

scene. At this juncture Jimmy noticed that a lady in a rose-pink sweater had run to the edge of the roof just above which the dirigible was moving, and that she was holding up her arms. His cigar dropped from his mouth a second later when he saw Bobby Wilkins grab her outstretched hands, swing her free of the roof and pull her into the car as the great dirigible finally cleared the stage setting and, in quick response to the hand of the pilot in the front car, nosed her way upward at a higher rate of speed. The curtain fell and the repressed excitement of the great audience found vent in tumultuous applause. The thing had happened so quickly that there were apparently few who had noticed that the wrong young woman had been saved from certain death by the timely arrival of Lieut. Thurston Turner, U. S. N.

"My God, what a whale of a story," chortled McClintock, gripping Jimmy's arm so fiercely that the press agent winced with pain.

"Yes, isn't it?", responded Jimmy dreamily as he watched the N-24 winging her way over the park and out towards the sea. The spectators had risen from their seats and were applauding again as a big American flag was unfurled from the rear car of the dirigible.

The balloon kept on its way toward the ocean and McClintock noticed that it didn't make the turn it usually did when it reached the giant roller coaster that ran along the shore. A puzzled expression came over his face. If he had looked at

Fresh Every Hour

Jimmy sharply just then he would have observed the first beginnings of a pleased smile tilting the corners of the press agent's mouth. A minute passed and the great yellow gas bag receded farther and farther in the distance. McClintock stepped down and borrowed a field glass from a spectator. He glued his eyes to it for a few moments and then dropped his arms. His face was pale.

"His motor's dead," he said weakly, "and he's drifting out to sea. The propellor's stopped and he's being carried out by this land breeze. We've got to do something—we've got to get help of some kind."

The manager was plainly worried. He pressed the glass on Jimmy, who had followed him out of the box, and the latter watched the clumsy balloon, now at the mercy of the stiff breeze which had blown up, slowly but surely disappearing in the opalescent haze which hung above the line where sky and ocean seemed to meet. The owner of the glasses had overheard McClintock's remark and had passed the word to his neighbor. In two minutes the news had spread through the great crowd and thousands of eyes were focused on the drifting speck which presently vanished.

McClintock, pushing Jimmy before him, started for the main office and found himself surrounded by an excited group of men and women. An up-standing chap in a British major's uniform who wore a cap on which was the red velvet band of a staff officer, stepped forward.

Fresh Every Hour

"We're Miss Ashley's friends," he said, with a touch of feeling in his voice, "and we'll do everything we can to assist you. She's a bit untamed, sir, and she shouldn't have done that wild, foolish thing, but she's the best woman alive for all of that and now that she's in danger we're going to help you see her out of it. Has that dirigible got a wireless on board?"

"No," replied the manager. "There wasn't any need for one. Since it's been here it's never been more than a mile or two away from the hangar before."

"That's bad—damned bad," responded the officer. "Of course, maybe they'll be able to fix the engine but we can't take chances on that. If you'll let me use your telephone I'll call up our embassy in Washington and get them to get in touch with the Navy Department. We'll have all the ships in range of the Arlington station on the lookout in an hour."

The thoroughly sobered group of pleasure seekers who had accompanied the Hon. Betty to Jollyland two hours before, followed McClintock and Jimmy Martin into the offices in the administration building and talked in low voices while the major began to fuss in the telephone booth with the long distance operator. Some of the women were weeping.

Chapter Four

In the seclusion of his private office Jimmy telephoned the Associated Press, the police and the nearest United States life saving station, in the order named, while McClintock, who was plainly tremendously worried, paced restlessly up and down the floor, pausing occasionally to glance out of the window at the broad expanse of sky and sea in the vain hope that some sight of the lost dirigible might greet his eye. Just as Jimmy began calling up the metropolitan newspaper offices in a fine frenzy of excitement, both men heard the office door slam violently. They turned in unison and found themselves confronted by Lolita Murphy. Gone was the shy manner, the demure smile and the air of coy ingenuousness. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes were blazing and her whole manner indicated that she was in what is generally referred to as a "state of mind."

"Hello, girlie," Jimmy called out pleasantly, "what's the matter?"

"Don't you dare girlie me, Mr. James T. Martin," retorted Lolita in a voice that she was palpably trying, with a great effort, to keep at an even and menacing tone. "Don't you dare to speak to me again. I came in to tell you that and to let you

Fresh Every Hour

know that even if I do come from Cedar Rapids I can't be fooled by any New York—by any New York—bunco man."

Her voice broke on the last word and tears came into her eyes despite the struggle she was making to hold herself in hand. Jimmy came toward her, but she waved him off hysterically. McClintock watched the proceedings in amazement.

"What's the idea, Lolita?" began the press agent beseechingly. "I don't get you. I don't understand."

"Don't try to tell me that," ran on Lolita, who was now half sobbing. "Don't try to tell me that you didn't turn me down when that English girl came into the park with all those society people and that you didn't get together with that Wilkins fellow to have me left there so you could get a better story out of it with her. You fixed it all up and you can't tell me that you didn't because I just know, that's all. I had a sweater on under my dress so's I wouldn't catch cold, and I had milk chocolate in my pocket and I'd written home to mother about it's going to happen and telling her not to worry about anything she might read in the papers the first day, and now nothing's happened at all to me and I've been made a fool of and it's all your fault if you ever try to come near me again or speak to me I'll slap your face, Mr. James T. Martin, I'll slap your face. Do you hear me, Mr. James T. Martin?—I'll slap your fresh little face."

She was gone before Jimmy could remonstrate.

Fresh Every Hour

The door closed behind her with a more reverberating bang than the one which had heralded her entrance. Jimmy dropped into the nearest chair and gazed vacantly into space. McClintock shook him roughly by the shoulder.

"Say," he shouted. "What in hell is this all about?"

"She handed me the mitt, Mac—she's handed me the mitt, and she wouldn't even let me explain," responded Jimmy brokenly. "It's the real heart-throb stuff this time, Mac, the real heart-throb stuff. I had everything framed up for her and this English jane just drops in like a joker runnin' wild and wins the hand."

"You had what framed?"

"Why—this drifting out to sea stunt," replied Jimmy in a dead voice.

"This drifting out to sea—you don't—you can't mean that this thing is a plant," gasped the manager incredulously.

"Of course it is," returned the press agent with something of the old note of self-assertiveness in his voice. "I had it all fixed up for Lolita, and now this society dame is goin' to get away with all the head-lines. When I saw Wilkins pull her into the car I didn't think he'd go all the way through, but it looks as if he's decided to. There's no use in worryin' about it. Every little thing is comin' out all right—and say—don't forget to remember that it's goin' to be some story now—some story."

Fresh Every Hour

"Just let me get this big idea through my head," persisted McClintock. "What happens next?"

"Of course his motor hasn't really gone dead," replied Jimmy. "He's just ordered his engineer to shut it off so they can drift with the wind. That was all framed up between us. He'll probably turn on the gas again and cruise around out of sight of land for a couple of hours and shut off his engine every time he sees a ship comin' in sight. That'll be an alibi for the story. When the little old sun starts to sink in the west he'll turn that gas bag towards the Jersey coast and he'll make a landing just before dark at a place we picked out yesterday morning. He's going to lay under cover there, and we'll keep the country guessin' all day tomorrow."

"But someone will see him land," criticized the manager.

"I don't think there's a chance of that," replied Jimmy jauntily. "We picked out a spot that's as lonesome lookin' as an iceberg. There isn't a house within two miles, and there's nothin' but marsh-land all around. There's one little place right in the center that's high and dry. That's where he lands. Wilkins has got his car planted a couple of miles away and his chauffeur is goin' to be right on the job in a row-boat—you see there's a little creek that runs through the swamp—and the girl is goin' to be taken away in the boat and slipped away to a hotel—that is, Lolita was goin' to be slipped away and was goin' to keep dark until she got the signal to appear again. Maybe this society queen'll be

Fresh Every Hour

game enough to go through with it just for the fun of the thing."

"We were goin' to keep the agony up until tomorrow night at the earliest and maybe until the day after tomorrow. Then Wilkins was goin' to telephone that he'd just landed after bein' tossed about in the air and all that, and Lolita was goin' to have a nervous collapse and be interviewed in bed by a flock of reporters with a couple of trained nurses and three doctors hoverin' around in the offing. You can fill in the other details yourself. Anyhow, it's a grand little notion for a story even if this Betty Ashley person doesn't come through. We'll know about that tonight."

"How so?"

"Why, the chauffeur has instructions to telephone me the minute he gets to the hotel. That ought to be not later than nine-thirty."

"Why didn't you tell me all about this beforehand?"

Jimmy smiled a bit guiltily before replying.

"I had a hunch that maybe you'd put the kibosh on the whole scheme because I was featurin' a certain party too much," he responded. He grew serious again for a minute and a far-away look crept into his eyes. "Say, Mac," he went on, "I had a number that called for the grand prize, and I've lost the ticket. It's rotten luck. From the way she spoke a few minutes ago I'll bet I don't ever get out again, not even on probation."

"That's be all right," consoled McClintock. "I'll

Fresh Every Hour

fix that part of it for you. It's a great story even if the Hon. Betty Ashley doesn't go through and if she does—why, if she does, it'll be the biggest thing ever pulled off in this country. Think of that for a little while."

The Associated Press and the metropolitan newspapers were inclined to be a bit skeptical of the facts which Jimmy telephoned them at the outset, but outside confirmation was forthcoming promptly and within two hours after Major Bobby Wilkins and Hon. Betty Ashley had disappeared in the general direction of the open sea the story was the sensation of the summer in journalistic circles.

A squad of picked feature writers invaded Jollyland in quest of detailed particulars concerning the events leading up to the beginning of the ill-fated balloon trip; seven sob sisters motored to the palatial home at which the Hon. Betty was a house guest and interviewed a weeping and distraught maiden aunt of that lady who had been acting as a submissive chaperone, and who was certain that when "dear Ned, her father, hears the news he'll froth at the mouth and have a stroke;" cables were frantically dispatched to London instructing correspondents to break the news to "dear Ned" and watch the results; city editors pawed over assortments of photographs of the beautiful heroine and conferred with art department heads as to the most suitable ones to use for decorative lay-outs; dozens of "leg-men" were sent out to points along the Jersey and Long Island coasts with directions to

Fresh Every Hour

watch for any possible news of the return of the balloon and to keep on the lookout for any pleasure yacht owner who might have seen the dirigible after she passed out of sight of land; the Washington offices were instructed to post a man in the navy department all night long to watch for any wireless news which might come flashing back from the torpedo boat destroyers which, at the urgent solicitation of the British ambassador, were to be sent out to scour the sea in search of the missing airship, and it was unanimously decided at editorial councils in every office to let the story "lead" the paper the following morning unless some great unforeseen national or international calamity transpired in the meantime.

Jimmy Martin became the focus point of more importunate newsgatherers than he had ever fancied, in his wildest dreams, would assail him for information and when a delegation of correspondents from a half dozen London papers looked in on him at eight o'clock and told him that they had been instructed to rush as much stuff as the cables would carry he almost passed into a trance.

"Mac," he confided to the manager when the English correspondents had gone, "I feel like the fellow who looked at the giraffe and said 'there 'aint no such animal.' There ain't no such story. It's a dream.

"Well, I've left instructions that we're not to be called," returned McClintock. "Let's dream a little more."

Fresh Every Hour

In the star dressing room on the big stage of the open air auditorium Lolita Murphy was getting ready for the evening performance of "Secret Service Sallie," and was making a brave effort to control herself. She was as forgotten as yesterday's newspaper and the realization of it sent great tears of bitter disappointment coursing down her rouged cheeks into the make-up box on the little table in front of which she sat.

Chapter Five

It was nearly midnight when Bobby Wilkins' chauffeur reported over the telephone to Jimmy Martin and McClintock, who had been keeping anxious vigil in the office all night.

"There ain't a sign of him," he said hurriedly. "I waited right where you told me to wait, and if he'd have been anywhere within a couple of miles I could have seen him after it got dark. The moon has been shining bright for a long time, and I had a pair of glasses with me. I'm afraid it's all up with him if he hasn't landed some place else along the coast. It's tough for all of us if anything's gone wrong, ain't it?"

The chauffeur was instructed to make another trip to the selected landing place and to stay there until dawn when relief was promised. Jimmy was pale and over-wrought when he hung up the telephone receiver and turned to McClintock.

"If he had landed any place else," he remarked, "he'd have made every effort to get to a phone. He'd know we'd be worried. Gee, Mac, supposin' somethin's happened to 'em. If there has little old Robert B. Remorse'll be my side-partner for life. He told me he'd be prepared for all emergencies and he's there with the nerve, but maybe they ran into a squall or something. Why'd I ever think of

Fresh Every Hour

this stunt? I've got too much imagination, Mac, I've got to teach it to lie down and behave."

The two sat up all night, smoking incessantly and discussing the variety of fates which they fancied might have overtaken the adventuresome Bobby Wilkins and his distinguished fellow passenger. Jimmy called up one of the newspaper offices every fifteen minutes for news, but there wasn't any worth mentioning. The dirigible had not been sighted by any ship with which the navy wireless had been able to get into communication and the half dozen destroyers sent out to search for it were reported to be without definite information.

The entire country seethed with the story in the morning. The Associated Press had carried fifteen hundred words into every newspaper office in every city of importance from coast to coast and the big dailies in Chicago, Philadelphia and Boston had three and four column stories from their metropolitan correspondents, liberally illustrated with pictures of the Hon. Betty, who was one of the most photographed women of her time. McClintock, who had no knowledge of Jimmy's promise to keep Bobby Wilkins' real name out of print, had blurted it out to a group of reporters in the evening and the salient facts concerning the modest wearer of three war medals were incorporated in all of the accounts. Robert Wilkins, Sr., forgot that he was a mere business machine, wiped a few tears out of the corners of his eyes, looked tenderly at a picture of a curly headed boy he always kept in one of the

Fresh Every Hour

drawers of his desk and started east on a special train.

The total haul in the New York morning papers was seventy-six columns of solid reading matter and thirty-eight photographic illustrations. Every angle of the story was covered in great detail and in addition to the main narrative there were extended biographical sketches of the Hon. Betty and of Bobby Wilkins. There were cabled stories from London concerning the festive career of the former and containing an expression of deep concern from the British premier. There were also eulogies of the one time ace from personages no less important than the American commander in chief in France and the generalissimo of the allied armies. All in all it was the most spectacular "feature story" in years and the greatest achievement in the history of American press agency. McClintock admitted that much when the first editions came in.

"Jimmy," he said, "it's a dog-goned shame that you've got to lie low and never get credit for this. Still you've got company. I was reading in the paper the other day that there's a well defined rumor that the more or less celebrated covenant of the well known League of Nations was finally framed up by a clerk in the British foreign office. You can drop over later on and take a little drink with him and cry it all out on each other's shoulder."

Jimmy's only response was a mournful attempt at a smile. He lit another cigarette, jerked out of

Fresh Every Hour

his chair and began to swear softly as he walked up and down the room. He made a vicious lunge with his foot at a waste-basket and kicked it through the door into the next office. Then he took off his soft hat, rolled it into a lump and slammed it down on the floor with a wide, sweeping gesture.

"I don't mind that so much," he said testily. "After landin' a smear like that, though, I'd kinda like to have a good time with myself for a few minutes. I'd kinda like to throw a few assorted flowers up in the air and let 'em drop on me, but I'm so gosh-darned worried about what's actually happened that I can't even have that much fun."

His anxiety increased as the day wore on and the early editions of the evening papers which played up the story even more extensively than the "mornings" failed to buoy him up. There was still no word of the N-24, and navy department officials in Washington were reported to be gravely alarmed at the possibilities.

At noon the British embassy gave out the announcement that "a distinguished person" had cabled for detailed information and had begged to be kept in hourly touch with the developments. Flaming head-lines carried the legend "King Anxious About Lost Dirigible." Upon reading this three rival publicity promoters who had suspected the presence of the fine Italian hand of Jimmy Martin in the proceedings from the beginning and who had foregathered for lunch in their favorite club, simultaneously started out on a joint jamboree that was to become

Fresh Every Hour

a memorable minor historical incident in the turgid annals of Broadway. It offered the only means of escaping from the tragic feeling of profound and passionate envy that surged up from the very depths of their beings.

At 3 o'clock as Jimmy, red-eyed and haggard, nodded at his desk between telephone calls, a messenger boy dropped a cablegram in front of him. He tore it open and gazed bewilderingly at this cryptic message:

HAMILTON, BERMUDA.

JAMES T. MARTIN.

JOLLYLAND PARK,

CONEY ISLAND, N. Y.

COME ON IN—THE WATER'S FINE—
GIVE MY REGARDS TO LOLITA, BUT
CAN'T SAY I'M SORRY IT HAPPENED AS
YET.

BOBBY WILKINS.

Jimmy gave a second look at the heading and rushed into the next office where McClintock was snoring sonorously on a sofa. He shook the manager savagely and waved the cablegram in front of his eyes.

"All's right with the world, Mac," he shouted joyously. "They've landed in Bermuda. Can you beat that fresh son-of-a-gun doin' a thing like that? What's the big idea, I wonder?"

McClintock grabbed the message and read it hurriedly.

"I guess maybe he's mailing the answer," he remarked. "It beats me. You'd better get a wire off to him asking for particulars."

Fresh Every Hour

The shrill summons of the telephone brought Jimmy back into his own office the next moment. The voice of his friend, Lindsay, the day desk man of the Associated Press, came over the wire in crisp, staccato sentences.

"Got some news for you," he said. "It's going to make this morning's headlines look sick. Here's the way our first bulletin reads:

"Washington, D. C.—July 7—The British ambassador has just given out the following cablegram received from the Governor-General of the Bermuda Islands:—'Please announce to press the marriage this morning in St. John's chapel, Hamilton, of the Hon. Elizabeth Ardsley Ashley, eldest daughter of Lord Norbonne, Bart., of London, England, to Robert Benjamin Wilkins, Jr., only son of Robert Benjamin Wilkins, Sr., of Chicago, Ill, U. S. A. The ceremony was entirely informal.'"

"I'm ordering three thousand words from our Bermuda correspondent," went on Lindsay, "and I'm having London break the news gently to dear, old dad. I suppose if I came down on Sunday with the wife and the kiddies you could slip us into a few of your side-shows."

"Say," responded Jimmy exultingly, "you're goin' to get a life pass good for each and every attraction within the big enclosure."

As he hung up the telephone and swung around in his swivel chair the door leading into the hall opened ever so gently and the pale and tear-stained face of Lolita Murphy peered through the open-

Fresh Every Hour

ing. Jimmy gazed at her, open-eyed, as she came slowly into the room. He noticed that she had a crumpled bit of paper in her hand.

"Jimmy," she said timidly, as she held out her arms in appealing supplianee, "I'm just a—just a foolish small town kid. I didn't understand—I didn't understand."

Jimmy, in a daze, took the paper which she held towards him. It was another cablegram. He smoothed it out and the peace that surpasseth understanding settled down upon him as he read these words:

HAMILTON, BERMUDA.

LOLITA MURPHY,

JOLLYLAND PARK,

CONEY ISLAND, N. Y.

WON'T IT EASE YOUR DISAPPOINTMENT A LITTLE TO KNOW THAT THE MAD IMPULSIVE THING I DID YESTERDAY AND THE RASH ACT I HAVE JUST COMMITTED IN THE CHAPEL HAVE TRANSFORMED ME INTO QUITE THE HAPPIEST WOMAN ALIVE—BOBBY HAS TOLD ME ALL ABOUT EVERYTHING AND HE FEARS THAT YOU MAY THINK YOUR FRIEND MR. MARTIN HAD A FINGER IN THE PIE—HE HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH IT, MY DEAR—IT WAS JUST FATE. OUR BEST REGARDS TO YOU BOTH.

ELIZABETH ASHLEY WILKINS.

McClintock, coming into the room just then, tipped out again and closed the door softly behind him, thus proving himself to be a gentleman of singular tact and discretion.

Chapter Six

An understanding with Lolita which contained certain qualifying clauses was one of the net results of the Adventure of the Lost Dirigible. Jimmy filed a number of demurrers, but they were overruled as soon as they were entered on the docket. He had been foolish enough to imagine on the celebrated morning after the night before that a perceptible scent of orange blossoms clogged the circumambient air, but this belief was soon dissipated by the young lady herself.

"I can't get married, Jimmy," she said earnestly, "until I find out about my career."

"What's that got to with it?"

"Why, just—why, everything. I was reading an article only the other day by Mary Garden in which she said that marriage cramped the career of a woman on the stage. She said that husbands were a handicap—that they held you back with the tail end of the procession and kept you from getting on. She said —"

Jimmy broke in with a scornful laugh.

"I suppose she mentioned Mrs. Fiske and Laurette Taylor and Ethel Barrymore and Blanche Bates and all the other selling platers who've been left at the post because they were foolish enough to enter the matrimonial stakes," he scoffed. "It's

Fresh Every Hour

really too bad about 'em. It looked once as if they had a chance."

Her mouth stiffened at this and she tossed her head with a little gesture that spelled stubborn defiance.

"Well—anyway—," she said, "I'm going to see how it works—for a little while. Maybe there isn't going to be any career for me beyond—well, beyond 'Secret Service Sallie.' If there isn't I might possibly——

She paused thoughtfully. Jimmy's scornful mood had passed and he looked at her appealingly.

"You might possibly what?" he ventured, cautiously. "There isn't goin' to be *another* catch in it, is there?"

"I'm afraid there is," she replied, quietly. "You'll have to settle down some place first. I don't think I'd ever learn how to keep house permanently in a hotel bed-room and besides——

Again a disturbing pause. Jimmy was rapidly becoming a pitiful object to behold.

"Get it all out of your system, sister," he said, weakly. "I'm a glutton for punishment."

"Well," she resumed evenly, "besides settling down you'd have to have some money in the bank—quite a little. That's the most important thing. There was a girl in our town once who ran off with a fellow in the show business and lived a hand-to-mouth sort of a life for several seasons after passing up a lot of good chances among the boys she knew. She's back selling stockings in Boyd's Em-

Fresh Every Hour

porium on First avenue now and she looks kind of faded out and tired. I like you a lot, Jimmy, and you've treated me better than I deserved and you're the nicest fellow I ever knew, but we've got to be sensible and wait and see how things work out. Won't you—please?"

The "please" was long drawn out and a bit plaintive. It touched the heart-strings of the hapless press agent and played a tender little strain upon them. He meekly agreed to all the qualifying clauses in the agreement and he would have signed on the dotted line if they had been three times as numerous.

Filled with a new enthusiasm his imagination began to run riot and within two weeks his surprise assaults upon the front line trenches of the forces defending the serried columns of the metropolitan daily newspapers resulted in space returns that established new records.

He contrived to have a member of the President's cabinet who happened to take a ride on the Dippy Dip stalled in his gondola one hundred and seventy-five feet in the air for half an hour while a squad of mechanics labored feverishly to get things straightened out. That landed on the front page of every paper in town. He married off the Armless Wonder in Bisbee's Carnival of Freaks to the Legless Marvel with a new result of six "picture spreads" and five and a half columns of solid reading matter. His discovery that the little dark-haired girl who danced on the open air stage in the big

Fresh Every Hour

free show every afternoon and evening was the daughter of a grand duke who had fled in disguise from Soviet Russia and who had feared to reveal her identity because of the possibility of attack by Bolshevik sympathizers in this country was his biggest coup, however. This was sensationally played up for all it was worth and considerably more in every New York daily and had been telegraphed all over the country. As a "follow-up" on this he arranged to have two uniformed guards accompany the young woman wherever she went. This, too, landed heavily and Jimmy's customary high opinion of his own prowess was perhaps more noticeable than ever.

One evening while he was sauntering through the incandescent splendor of Jollyland in a mood of supreme elevation, he heard the booming voice of McClintock hailing him from the porch of the administration building.

"Come out of it," the manager shouted.

Jimmy dropped back to earth with a start and sauntered toward the office.

"Gosh," observed McClintock, "you looked as if you were off on a long journey. I hope you brought an idea back with you. We need one. That's what I wanted to talk to you about."

Jimmy smiled the inscrutable smile of one who is the custodian of the wisdom of the ages.

"I've got a neat little assortment of goods I picked up," he responded cockily. "What can I offer you?"

Fresh Every Hour

"Well, it's this way," returned McClintock. "You haven't pulled anything yet about our co-worker, Signor Antonio Amado, and his trained animal show. He's just been bawling his head off to me. Says there's a conspiracy on foot to keep him out of the papers and threatens all kinds of trouble if we don't slip something over about his concession right away. I know you planned to get around to him before long, but you'd better start something right off. Can you think of anything?"

Jimmy didn't reply for nearly half a minute. His general manner betokened profound mental concentration.

"I guess we can accommodate that bird," he finally remarked. "I don't want to hurl any purple pansies at myself, but I think I've got a stunt that'll pretty nearly crowd everything else on to the back page. I've got seven other animal stories ready, but I think this one has a shade on all of 'em. I'll slip over and ooze it into our Dago friend's intellect."

The manager laughed good-naturedly.

"Say," he commented, "you're the best little friend of yourself you ever had, aren't you? Just hand out a little of that conversation to Tony and he'll lie down and behave for a few hours. Tell him you'll get his picture in all the papers. That'll make a hit with him. He's a member of your lodge."

The implications of the last remark made about as much impression on Jimmy as did the idle wind which at that moment was lightly brushing his cheek. He strolled over to the garish and gaudy

'Fresh Every Hour

building which housed Amado's Colossal and Gargantuan Collection of Trained Wild Beasts from the Trackless Jungle; paused just long enough at the main entrance to tell the dark-eyed lady cashier that she looked like a pocket edition of Maxine Elliott and passed into the auditorium where Signor Amado was directing the progress of the final show of the night.

The animal trainer was a short, stocky, swarthy-hued Latin with beady eyes, shiny black hair, and a moustache to the care of which he devoted himself with self-effacing solicitude. It was a fierce looking affair with ends pointed like a rapier, which thrust themselves aggressively upwards at a sharp angle giving the signor's dark countenance a look of great ferocity. He tried desperately hard at all times to live up to that moustache and he had a habit of working himself into violent rages which were, in reality, rather hollow and empty affairs, as even the most casual observer could see. He was at heart, a weak and excessively vain little man. Only the animals who leaped or cowered at his command were fooled by his appearance of ferocity.

At the conclusion of the show he retired to his office and began to pour into the unreceptive ears of the general director of promotion and publicity a voluble stream of protest against the neglect of himself which Jimmy was able to check only with great difficulty.

"Listen, Signor," he finally managed to remark. "You're wastin' gas you'll need some day when

Fresh Every Hour

you're climbin' uphill. I came in to tell you about a scheme I've got that'll put you and your show right in the center of the map in bright green, and you begin this eruption stuff that doesn't get you even a look-in. Will you listen to me?"

"All right. I makea de listen," replied Signor Amado, "but eef eet eesa nota one gooda schema thata makea me hava de face—Signor Antonio Amado's face—all ever de—what you call?—all over de whole damned place—I queeta de park—so."

He snapped his fingers airily and shrugged his shoulders. Jimmy proceeded to expound and expatiate, and as he did so the signor's face took on a look of intense interest. Presently it was wreathed in smiles, and he was patting the press agent on the back and uttering words expressive of pleased delight. The conspirators conferred for a half an hour, carefully going over Jimmy's plan of campaign and adjusting the smallest details thereof so that there would be no disturbing faux pas on the morrow. They pledged the success of the enterprise just before midnight in brimming glasses of Chianti which the signor drew from a secret hiding place in his desk.

At about ten o'clock on the following morning an express wagon drove up in front of Signor Amado's concession and four husky attendants brought out a large box which was placed on it. Jimmy drew the driver aside and gave him final instructions.

"Get right near the tower on the Manhattan side of the Brooklyn bridge," he said, "and figure on

Fresh Every Hour

making it at just about noon. Drive slowly and if anyone near you makes a noise like a cop don't pull anything just then. Wait till there's no one lookin' and then reach back, unfasten the hasp and lift the lid. Then you've got to register surprise, consternation and annoyance and suggest calling up Signor Amado when the plot begins to thicken, if you get what I mean."

The driver, a typical "wise" product of the New York streets, nodded his head, Signor Amado spoke a few mystic words through a wire netting at one end of the box and the "plant" started on its way after Jimmy gave a final parting instruction.

"I'll probably be in the immediate vicinity when things begin to break," he cautioned, "but for the love of P. T. Barnum don't make any signs of recognition."

Chapter Seven

And so it came to pass that at the appointed hour Jimmy, nonchalantly strolling along the promenade near the great stone tower on the Manhattan side of the bridge, cast a wary glance down towards the roadway and observed the express wagon slowly jogging along directly underneath. The driver, covertly glancing to the right and the left, reached behind the seat with a quick movement, fumbled for an instant with the hasp and, after lifting back the lid of the box, resumed his two-handed control of the reins, perceptibly slowing up the speed of the wagon.

The next instant the mischievous and uncannily human looking head of a large-sized monkey appeared above the top of the box. He blinked for a moment in the strong sunlight, reassured himself that the driver was not watching him, leaped lightly to the roadway and made for the network of auxiliary cables which run from the main supporting cables of the great bridge. Following him came a procession of other monkeys of varying sizes and kinds—short-tails and long-tails, some with weird whiskers and others as devoid of facial adornment as a new-born babe—all of them chattering and gibbering, each one intensely alive and apparently

Fresh Every Hour

determined on having the time of his or her young life as the case might be. There were fifteen of them in all and as they sprang out of the wagon, one by one, and started to join the venturesome leader of the expedition they attracted the attention of scores of pedestrians, chauffeurs and drivers.

"Hey, there, young fellow," shrieked a man on the promenade. "You gosh-darned zoo in escaping."

The driver stopped the wagon suddenly, turned around and proceeded to give a perfect imitation of a man in that particular frame of mind popularly known as a "blue funk." He jumped to the roadway and tried to clutch the last of the escaping simians by the hind legs. That agile creature eluded his grasp and joined two of his brethren who were chattering gaily at the base of the labyrinthian maze of cables and supports. By this time the first dozen of the monkeys had clambered aloft and were surveying the constantly increasing crowd of joyous onlookers from points of vantage anywhere from twenty to a hundred feet in the air.

A policeman shouldered his way through the front ranks of the crowd and looked up at the galaxy of nimble apes. He was sputtering and fuming with rage.

"Come down out of that," he yelled helplessly, shaking his club in an absurdly futile attempt to wield authority.

The crowd roared with delight. One of the monkeys still on the ground darted toward him,

Fresh Every Hour

leaped on his shoulder and sprang from it to the nearest cable far above his head before he was conscious of exactly what had happened. He struck vainly at it with his stick. The crowd rocked with laughter. Two other policemen joined him, forcing their way with difficulty through the dense mass of pedestrians on the promenade.

"Maybe if we whistled at him, Dinny," observed one of these sagely, "they might come down."

The three guardians of the law proceeded to pucker up their lips and to emit a series of plaintive whistles which so startled the one-time denizens of the jungle that all of them, as if swayed by some common impulse, swung lightly to places ten or twelve feet higher.

"Sing 'em a little song," shouted a ribald youth and the crowd once more chortled with glee.

At this juncture a police lieutenant arrived on the scene, attracted from a distance by the great congestion of traffic. More than two thousand persons were now gathered on the promenade and vehicular progress in both directions was clogged. A long line of trolley cars was strung out to the east and the west, and several hundred motor cars and trucks were stalled while their drivers crowded forward to enjoy the fun. The lieutenant sized up the seriousness of the situation instantly. He dispatched one of the patrolmen to telephone for the reserves and to send in a still alarm for the fire department, and then turned to Jimmy's willing tool, the driver. That individual, still registering

Fresh Every Hour

dazed bewilderment, shrugged his shoulders when asked to assist in bringing down the escaped monkeys, who were now festooned in irregular formation along the interlocking cables for a distance of several hundred feet. Most of them were swinging by their tails and otherwise comporting themselves with a supreme disregard for law and order.

"I can't do a thing, boss," persisted the driver. "I don't know the first name of a single one of the bunch. Maybe if some one telephoned for the gink that owns 'em he might be able to bring 'em down."

And so it further came to pass that Signor Antonio Amado was reached on the telephone at Jollyland; that he swore lustily in three languages in simulation of great consternation and that he promised to come to the scene of hostilities as rapidly as his touring car could bring him. When he arrived forty minutes later, the crowd had grown to ten thousand and the greatest tie-up of traffic in the history of the bridge was in progress. The firemen from two hook and ladder companies were making ineffectual efforts to bring down the innocent disturbers of the great city's peace and dignity and a certain press agent, watching the proceedings from a discreet distance, was enjoying the biggest emotional experience of a somewhat checkered and not altogether drab career. He was getting the same sort of thrill that comes to the playwright as he stands in the rear of a theatre during a tense scene in a play of his writing and watches a great

Fresh Every Hour

audience swayed by something he has originated.

Jimmy noticed with keen interest that a group of newspaper men had already gathered on the scene, and that among them was no less a celebrity than Frank Malia, of the Item, the star feature writer of the Eastern Seaboard and a specialist in stories with a humorous angle. Jimmy knew that there were standing orders in the Item office to "let Malia's stuff run," and he felt reasonably sure of at least a column and half in that particular paper.

It may be recorded that the arrival of Signor Amado, resplendent in the snappy green and white huzzar uniform he wore while directing the performances in his concession, brought the festivities to a rapid conclusion. In response to sharply spoken words of command from the fierce-looking little trainer the truant apes descended rather reluctantly from their perches and permitted themselves to be herded together once more into the wooden cage, the top of which was now securely fastened down under the personal direction of the police inspector who had arrived to take charge of affairs a few minutes before.

The great throng cheered the signor vociferously when he had finished and stepped into his car. He bowed again and again, kissed his hand, waved his busby and gave other indications of profound satisfaction with himself and with what he felt to be the justly merited plaudits accorded him. Jimmy permitted himself to be swallowed up in the eddies

Fresh Every Hour

of the dispersing crowd, as the signor's car whirled him back to Jollyland.

The subsequent proceedings were all that the most sanguine and optimistic press agent could desire. The story landed with a big splash in all the evening papers, and four of the morning papers covered it with feature yarns running all the way from three quarters of a column to nearly two columns in length. The longest story of all was written by Malia. It was a delightful bit of foolery written in a spirit of satirical burlesque and full of whimsical little touches that made it the talk of the week in journalistic circles.

There was only one thing that marred the perfect symmetry of the general effect. While the fact that the monkeys' temporary habitat was Jollyland was properly chronicled in headlines and in the body of all the stories, there was no mention made by name of Signor Antonio Amado except in one paper and then his alliterative cognomen was atrociously misspelled and appeared as Andy Amato. He was referred to, of course, and described as well, but impersonally. Mention was made in one story of "a funny little fellow who looked as if he had escaped from the chorus of a "Balkan operatta," and Malia had called him "a bandit king with the manners of a marquis and the sang-froid of a Subway guard."

After glimpsing the evening papers and observing this omission Jimmy had turned over the conduct of affairs in his office for the night to his

Fresh Every Hour

assistant, hoping that the morning papers would use the signor's name. When he read the others at breakfast his elation at the general success of his personally conducted enterprise was tempered somewhat by the prospect of an eruption from the Vesuvian temperament of the animal trainer. He wasn't particularly disturbed at this because he had sized the signor up as a false alarm from the start, but it meant a disconcerting half hour or so and he was a little bit peeved that the fates should have allotted him anything that was not rosy and serene on what should have been a day of general rejoicing and glad acclaim.

McClintock met him at the entrance to Jollyland. The manager wore an anxious look.

"Tony's off the reservation," he confided. "He did a series of flip-flops in my office a half hour ago and I understand that he's turning handsprings all around his arena at the present writing. He inquired about your health. I told him you had gone over to Philadelphia on a little business for me. Better stick to the office all day. He never keeps these things up for more than twenty-four hours. Grand little story, that, even if it did annoy the King of Beasts."

—67—

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Chapter Eight

Another of life's irritations managed to try the soul of McClintock that morning. One of the more or less wild and untutored savages from the South Sea Island Village on the ocean side of the park came into the possession of a pint flask of the Demon Rum which had been washed up on the beach, and with no regard for the refined niceties of imbibing had swallowed the contents in a series of continuous gulps. The subsequent proceedings relieved the ennui and lethargy which always enfolded Jollyland in the morning hours before the gates were thrown open to the general public.

The savage gentleman—a thin, wiry person with wicked looking eyes from whose slit ear lobes, nose and lower lip there hung a choice collection of carved sea shells and brass rings, went into executive session with himself and proclaimed a Reign of Terror as the best means of establishing a dictatorship over the fellow members of his tribe, and the entire park as well. He started proceedings by invading his straw-thatched domicile and seriously damaging, with a well-directed blow, the facial contour of the companion of his joys. That lady, a most formidable party who had been taken un-awares, retaliated in kind with such verve and

Fresh Every Hour

energy that the self-constituted dictator left his domestic hearth with great suddenness and started on the rampage through the village street.

He seemed to have no carefully calculated plan of campaign and no particular objective. A general demolishment of all existing institutions, a comprehensive destruction of private property in general and a leveling of class distinctions appeared to be his vague aim. He leaped through a frame on which one of the natives was weaving a blanket, completely ruining the work of months; he overturned a shelf full of crude earthenware jugs which the potter of the establishment had contrived; and he playfully kissed the stout and principal wife of Mumbo Tom, the chief of the village. When that venerable worthy attempted to remonstrate in an outburst of outraged dignity, he tweaked the old fellow's nose three times in rapid succession.

Passing out through the main gateway of the village into the esplanade he continued his ruthless assaults on organized society. Uttering weird and entirely unintelligible invocations to the spirits of his savage ancestors in a high-pitched voice, he vaulted on to the back of a patient-looking camel which was being groomed by a red-fezzed Egyptian from Greenville, Mississippi, preparatory to being ridden by visitors to the park at twenty-five cents per head. He dug his bare heels into the beast's sides and emitted a wild whoop. The camel turned her head, surveyed him rather bewilderingly and started down the roadway on a brisk canter for

Fresh Every Hour

about a hundred feet. Then she gave a little snort and heaved her humps convulsively. The social rebel from the South Seas shot through the air and landed in the direct center of a booth presided over by a gentleman from Nippon and devoted to what is known as the "Japanese ball game." The results here were disastrous. When he picked himself from the clutter of broken china and glass with which he was almost entirely covered his head was bloody, but unbowed. He shook himself like some shaggy dog just emerging from a dip in the ocean, bounded over the counter and made for Antonio Amado's wild animal show, pursued by a howling mob of attendants and special policemen who had gathered from the four corners of the park.

He burst through the entrance to the enclosure and ran along a passageway into the private office of Signor Amado himself. That ferocious looking worthy was, at the moment, delivering a philippic to his principal assistant, a pungent diatribe directed against the press, press agents, stupid park managements and the inherent injustice of mankind in general. At the sight of the wild-eyed and blood-stained visitor from an alien clime in the doorway, he passed in the middle of a sentence. His jaw dropped and his face turned ghastly white. He ducked behind a desk and mumbled a fervid appeal to the patron saint of his native village in Lombardy. The visitor looked around for something to destroy. His gaze encountered a half empty bottle of Chianti on a table and he sprang for it with the

Fresh Every Hour

fierce avidity of a lion leaping at his prey from ambush. The contents of the bottle were gurgling down his throat to the accompaniment of half-choked chuckles of delight when the pursuing mob closed in a few seconds later and quelled the revolution. McClintock rushed in as the special policemen were putting a pair of handcuffs on the would be Trotsky. Signor Amado, arising from behind the desk, confronted him.

"Whatafor you leta theese fella in here, eh?" he cried belligerently, his old pose of aggressiveness automatically asserting itself at the sight of the pinions which held the savage intruder safely bound.

McClintock laughed at the sheer absurdity of this remark.

"We didn't let him in any place, Tony," he replied. "He just happened to drop in here and several places along the line before we could catch up with him."

"Whata make him so bada man, er?" inquired the animal trainer.

"Booze, Tony, plain old-fashioned booze. They tell me he picked up a bottle on the beach some one must have dropped off an excursion boat. These fellows can't stand intoxicants of any kind. It makes 'em wild. I see he's been cutting into your Chianti."

He gave orders for the temporary bestowal of the now thoroughly chastened and mollified revolutionary, and was following the latter's captors out

Fresh Every Hour

of the office when Signor Amado plucked him by the sleeve.

"Say, meester," inquired the latter. "You geta my face in de papers tomor', eh?"

The manager shook his head.

"I'm afraid that won't be possible—that is tomorrow," he replied. "I told you this morning we'd do the very best we could to work up another story about you next week when this monkey yarn was sort of died down. Then we'll see what we can do about landing your picture right. Don't worry. Leave it all to me.

Signor Amado assumed a defiant attitude.

"I giva you—what you call, eh?—a warning. You have my face in alla de papers tomor' or, by dam, I feexa de park gooda."

McClintock had heard threats like that before. He shrugged his shoulders and walked out. Signor Amado's shifting glance fell upon the overturned Chianti bottle on the table and remained there for a few seconds. A malicious gleam slowly crept into his beady eyes and he smiled.

It is hardly necessary to chronicle the fact that the classic features of Eignor Antonia Amado did not decorate the pages of any of the metropolitan newspapers on the following day. McClintock hadn't bothered to tell Jimmy anything about the animal trainer's threat. He refused to take it seriously himself and he saw no reason for worrying the press agent with any mention of it, particularly as that gentleman was busily engaged in working

Fresh Every Hour

out the details of a fresh story which was to center around the fake kidnapping of two babies from the Infant Incubator.

When Signor Amado himself had carefully scanned the papers, and had convinced himself once more of the existence of a secret conspiracy to keep his name out of print he was strangely silent for one prone to burst into vociferous vocalization on the slightest provocation. He even chuckled a little when he put the last paper down and his beady eyes glinted nastily again. He strolled out into the room where his animals paced restlessly back and forth in the cramped limits of their stuffy cages and he spoke to several of them on his parade of inspection.

"Dey teenka day make beega foola of your boss, Lena," he remarked to a great lioness who pushed her nose against the bars of her cage at his approach, "but, by dam, he makea dem feel ver' foolish eh, Lena? He puta de whole parka on de bum. What you say, Lena, eh?"

He playfully poked at the splendid creature's flank and she responded with a long drawn out roar of really terrifying volume. Signor Amado felt moved to sinister laughter.

"Dat's right, olda girl," he continued. "I puta de whole park on de bum?"

Chapter Nine

Rain began to fall early that afternoon, a steady persistent downpour that held no immediate promise of abatement. A melancholy grayness enveloped Jollyland, converting it into a bleak and dismal habitation wherein dwelt people who seemed to have drunk of the chalice of desolation. Rain at the seaside is depressing enough, but rain in a summer park in the height of the season, rain that comes up just after the gates are opened and that looks as if it would last for twenty-four hours, produces an effect of gloom that almost defies description. Thousands of once gay flags twisted themselves limply around their poles; dozens of lady cashiers who hadn't taken in a cent for hours and who were tired of their novels and incessant gum-chewing gazed listlessly into the leaden sky and wished they were home in Flatbush or Astoria; low-spirited concessionaires figured up their losses with pencil and paper and would have cursed the Fates if they had known of the existence of those divinities; performers, literally sick with ennui, clustered in little groups under cover and querulously argued with each other about trivialities; the waiters in the "Trianon" restaurant at the end of what was called the Street of a Thousand Delights,

Fresh Every Hour

foreseeing that there would be no largesse forthcoming until the dawn of another day, rolled dice for the previous night's pickings or aimlessly discussed Flying Scud's chances in the fifth race at Belmont Park; the South Sea Islanders crooned weird chants under the shelter of their grass huts and McClintock smoked thick, black cigars and called up his friend in the weather bureau every fifteen minutes in a vain search for cheerful tidings. At seven o'clock in the evening—not a single patron having crossed the threshold of the park for four hours and the weather man's report still being "continued rain"—he ordered Jollyland officially closed for the night, shut his desk with a vicious slam and stepped over to Jimmy Martin's office for a chat.

"Well," remarked the press agent, glancing up from his typewriter, "it looks as if we were in for a nice quiet evening at home. Has there been any squawk lately from my Italian friend?"

"There's hasn't been a peep out of him since yesterday," replied the manager. "This rain has given him something else to worry about. He loves money as the flowers love the dew, and I'll bet he hasn't taken in \$8.25 all day."

McClintock dropped into a chair, swung one foot on Jimmy's desk and lazily puffed at his cigar while the press agent ground out on the clicking machine a romantic tale concerning a lady rejoicing in the cognomen of Montana Maggie, who rode a cow pony in Laramie Ike's Wild West Show and who

Fresh Every Hour

totally annihilated dozens of glass balls with her trusty rifle at every exhibition given in that concession. Outside the rain poured incessantly. A mist-laden breeze found its way through the open windows, but it didn't seem to dampen the pristine enthusiasm of Jimmy Martin who was working with all the fervor of a reporter trying to catch an edition with a big murder story and the "dead line" only ten minutes away.

Presently there came to the ears of both men the echo of a far-off sound that penetrated through the monotonous murmur of the dripping rain. It seemed like the blended babble of many voices and yet it was vaguely indistinct. McClintock jerked his foot off the desk and straightened up in his chair.

"If it wasn't raining so-dog-goned hard," he remarked "I'd say someone was staging a doughboy's 'welcome home' parade or a young riot. What is it, I wonder?"

"There's doings somewhere close at hand," was Jimmy's comment as he stood up, walked towards one of the windows, and peered out. "Here's little old Paul Revere now, coming to tell us the news."

The next instant a dripping park attendant, white-faced and trembling with excitement, burst through the door.

"Mr. McClintock," he stammered, "there's particular hell to pay down in the South Sea village. That bunch of wild-eyed nuts is all soused and they

Fresh Every Hour

look as if they was gettin' ready to go on the war-path. They're crazy drunk—where they got the stuff beats me,—and they're dancin' around and singing' songs fierce and when Patsy Burke tried to go in and argue with 'em they threw spears at him. He got cut in the shoulder—it ain't anything bad—but you can't tell what'll happen and the rest of us is kinda upset. You'd better come along right away. We've got guards posted all around the fence, but I'm afraid if they start to come out something pretty rough'll happen."

"The end of a perfect day," murmured the manager as he jammed his hat on his head and plunged out into the driving rain, closely followed by Jimmy and the attendant.

The events of the next hour were as full of exciting incident as the entire fifteen reels of a movie "serial." The attendant had spoken truly when he stated that the forty-odd savages in the village were drunk. They were roaring, raving drunk. When McClintock and Jimmy reached their habitat they were filling the air with wild cries and maniacal shrieks. They were brandishing spears and vicious looking war clubs, and were dancing about the grass hut of Chief Mumbo Tom with all the fierce abandon of whirling dervishes. That ancient dignitary was sitting in front of the royal palace on his throne chair in a state of maudlin stupor, draining the last dregs of a bottle which he held to his lips and directing the festivities with encouraging waves of his free hand. The steady downpour of

Fresh Every Hour

rain seemed to have no effect whatever on the celebration.

Finally the chief dropped the bottle and clapped his hands. There was silence for a moment and he made a brief speech, liberally punctuated by hiccoughs. When he had finished the others gave a concerted cheer and turned towards the stockade which surrounded the village.

"They're coming out," shouted McClintock, who was peering through an opening, "get your clubs ready, boys. Don't anybody shoot. We'll get into all kinds of a mix-up if you do."

The battle royal which followed lasted for several minutes. The special policeman and other attendants gathered outside the enclosure won out after a desperate struggle and drove all but three of the rioters back. These three managed to worm their way through the press and went shrieking up the main street of Jollyland in emulation of their brother whose adventures of the day before have already been duly chronicled. The net damage which they wrought before capture was appraised on the following day at several thousand dollars. When the partially sobered villagers renewed their effort to get out of the stockade fifteen minutes later they were met with decided opposition from the park's fire company, which had been called out by McClintock. A well directed high-pressure stream of water from a fire hose sent them tumbling over one another in disordered array and brought about a final cessation of hostilities.

Fresh Every Hour

In the excitement attendant upon the suppression of the incipient revolution no one observed a spectator who watched the proceedings from a sheltered position directly opposite the main entrance of the village. No one overheard his chuckles or saw him twirl the ends of his waxed moustache with a little gesture expressive of pleased satisfaction with himself. For that matter no one had seen one of his assistants unload three cases of Chianti from a push-cart in the rear of Mumbo Tom's dwelling late in the afternoon during a particularly heavy downpour of rain or had overheard the announcement that the villagers were requested to drink to Signor Antonio Amato's health. And there was no one to overhear the signor murmur as he stole back to his office through the gathering darkness.

"I tella dem I putta de park on de bum."

Chapter Ten

Fifteen minutes after peace had been declared McClintock and Jimmy, both thoroughly soaked and decidedly uncomfortable, foregathered in the latter's office for a comparison of notes and a general consultation.

"That'd make a pippin' of a story if you'd dare to let it get out," ventured the press agent as he wrung out the corner of his saturated coat into a waste-basket.

"Well, I don't take the dare," returned the manager peevishly. "That's one story that the censor isn't going to let get through if he can stop it."

"What's the harm?" inquired Jimmy innocently.

McClintock looked him over carefully before replying.

"What's the idea?" he remarked scornfully. "Is your reason tottering on its throne? Don't you know that if this thing got out it'd scare away the family parties that are the backbone of our patronage? You couldn't induce women to come within half a mile of the park if they heard about this rumpus. They'd think it might happen again any minute and they'd remain away in a body—and they'd keep father and the boys away too. Get that straight."

Fresh Every Hour

"There's something in it, I guess," opined Jimmy slowly.

"You put your money three ways on that. You've got a new job tonight, mister man. You've got to forget about putting things in the papers. It's up to you to keep something out for a change."

"Maybe somebody'll blab the whole thing."

"I've issued orders to have everyone instructed to give an imitation of a tongue-tied clam, but so dog-goned many people were in on this that it's pretty certain there'll be a leak somewhere. That's where you come in."

"What can I do?" inquired the press agent ruefully. He was plainly displeased with the vista opened up by his superior.

"You can do every little thing there is to do," returned McClintock firmly. "I want you to make a personal matter of this. I want you to drop into town and make the rounds of all the morning papers. I want you to see every city editor and make a special plea to have the thing hushed up. Tell 'em it'll ruin us for the summer if it gets out. Make it strong. It's going to be the acid test of how useful you really are around here. String 'em along. Let 'em understand that you won't take 'no' for an answer. I'm going to dust over home in my car for a clean-up and a long, dreamy nap. Good-night."

Jimmy started to expostulate, but he stopped short when the office door slammed in his face. He stood irresolutely as the chug-chug of McClintock's

Fresh Every Hour

machine died away in the distance. Then he dropped into a chair, reached for a pack of cigarettes on the table, lit one and indulged himself in painful cogitation. Under ordinary circumstances he would have experienced profound physical discomfort from his water-soaked clothes and the general feeling of stickiness that enveloped him from head to feet, but physical feelings were matters of slight importance to him at the moment. The distress which was registered upon his face was purely mental in its origin, but it was intense and singularly disturbing. He felt that he was up against the hardest job of his life and he could see no way to hurdle what seemed to be the insurmountable barriers that confronted him.

In the language of journalism Jimmy "knew news." He knew precisely what sort of an incident or happening or bit of romancing, for that matter, would appeal to the trained newspaper executive as worth playing up and precisely the sort of stuff that would be passed up. By all the tests he was familiar with, by all the general rules and regulations of the game, the story of the jamboree of the savage gentlemen from the far-flung isles of the Pacific, of their attempt to raid the park, of the battle between them and the guards and of their final defeat was one of the biggest bits of "feature news" that had transpired in or about New York that summer.

If it had "leaked" into any newspaper office he knew there was about as much chance of his keep-

Fresh Every Hour

ing it out of print by making a personal plea, as there would be of suppressing the announcement of the engagement of a daughter of the president of the United States to the Prince of Wales. If it hadn't "leaked"—and there was a fair chance that it hadn't—because of the state of the weather—he was painfully aware of the fact that by calling on the city editors in person and asking them not to use it he would simply be handing them a tip on which they would base an investigation. The story was decidedly too good to be hushed up by any plaintive wail about "ruining our business."

He would have mentioned all of these things to McClintock if the latter hadn't made such an abrupt departure. He told himself now that even if he had been able to voice them the manager wouldn't have comprehended the impossible nature of the task he had so casually mapped out. Folks who haven't smelt the smell of the paste-pot and heard the presses roar usually have the weirdest sort of naive notions concerning just what and just what cannot be done in the way of either inserting news in the columns of a great metropolitan daily or keeping it out.

"The acid test"—Jimmy kept remembering these three words and the oftener they recurred to him the more distressed he became. He sat hunched up in his chair looking out into the pouring rain and consuming cigarettes at a most alarming rate. At about the middle of the sixth cigarette he straightened up; at the beginning of the seventh

Fresh Every Hour

he arose and began to pace the floor while a new idea slowly unfolded in his active mind; when he was two puffs into the eighth he flung it into a corner with a resolute sweep of his arm, dived for the telephone, called up "Beekman 4,000," and impatiently joggled the hook until a response came.

"Hello, World?" he said jerkily, "give me the city desk . . . hello . . . city desk? . . . Who is that? McCarthy? . . . Say, Mr. McCarthy, this is Martin of Jollyland—Martin—M-A-R-T-I-N—publicity director of Jollyland—raining here? You betcha—say, I've got something pretty good for you . . . hot stuff. . . . Be on the look-out for it, will you?—Dope?—No, sir, this is the real goods. No fooling—on the level—you can expect it before midnight. Good-bye."

In the next ten minutes Jimmy, in a frenzy of feverish haste, called up the city desks of all the other morning papers and repeated practically the same message to each. Then he ordered three messenger boys to report to him in half an hour, stuck six sheets of carbon between seven long sheets of copy paper, inserted the numerous layers in his typewriter and began to pound out, with ever increasing speed, a narrative that was to either make or break him.

It was nearly midnight when an office boy dropped a long manilla envelope marked "NEWS—RUSH" on the desk in front of Larry McCarthy,

Fresh Every Hour

night city editor of the World. The early mail edition had gone to press ten minutes before and McCarthy had just come up for air for a brief interval before plunging into the final activities of the night. The tension had relaxed and he was joking with the managing editor who had stopped to give a few parting instructions on his way home.

McCarthy tore the envelope open almost unconsciously as he went on talking and unfolded the four long sheets of paper which it contained, sheets covered with closely written typewritten matter. His gaze drifted carelessly to the top page where it lingered as something seemed immediately to interest him. A cynical smile began to play over his features as he read. Presently it broadened into something more mellow and human. Then he burst into hearty laughter.

"Shades of Tody Hamilton," he chortled. "Here's the last word in hysterical romance. This fellow makes 'em all look like pikers. He called me up on the phone to tell it was hot stuff. Well, it certainly is. It certainly is."

"What is it?" questioned the managing editor.

"It's a pipe dream by a bright young gentleman who seems to be trying to make a living by getting pieces in the paper for Jollyland. He must come from some place in the tall, tall grass if he labors under the delusion that he can put anything as raw as this over on a New York paper. I'll give him credit, though. It's a masterpiece of its kind. If someone ever starts a press agent's school this

Fresh Every Hour

could be used verbatim as a horrible example of the kind of a contribution *not* to send out.

Just listen to this heading:

BLOODY UPRISING BY SOUTH SEA ISLANDERS AT JOLLYLAND QUELLED

**BELIEVED TO BE RESULT
OF BOLSHEVIK PLOT**

**Maddened Savages Armed With
Spears and War Clubs Run
Amuck and Attempt to Take
Possession of Park.**

**WHISKERED RUSSIAN SEEN
ACTING SUSPICIOUSLY**

"Isn't that immense?" went on McCarthy. "Can you tie the colossal nerve of that fellow sending a thing like that out? Get his opening paragraph:

"'Maddened with a thirst for human blood and believed to be acting under instructions from a Bolshevik agitator who was seen prowling about in the early evening 186 naked savages from the South Sea Islands made a desperate attempt last night to massacre all the whites in Jollyland, the gigantic summer park on Coney Island. Giving utterance to

Fresh Every Hour

blood-curdling cries of vengeance and undaunted by the driving rain which was falling at the time they made an attempt to break out of the village, where they give daily exhibitions of their quaint and curious native customs, and were held in check by the park attendants only after a wild and furious struggle lasting for nearly half an hour! . . ."

The managing editor laughed uproariously.

"The poor old Bolsheviki," he chuckled. "Even the press agents are using 'em. That story's certainly a gem of purest ray serene. I'd like to meet that young fellow. He'd make an interesting study."

The telephone bell on McCarthy's desk rang just then and the city editor reached for the receiver.

"Hello," he shouted. "Yes—McCarthy—yes, I got one, too—it's a bird—we've just had the best laugh of the month over it—most sublime imagination uncovered since Dante—you bet!"

"That's Carlton of the Gazette—night desk man," he said as he hung up. "He's got a great sense of humor. Wanted to know if I'd had this and offered to send me his copy if I'd been forgotten."

He crumpled Jimmy's composition up in a ball and tossed it in the big waste-basket at his side as a boy slipped him a first copy of the mail edition wet from the press.

Chapter Eleven

The rain ceased falling at midnight. The moon emerged from behind a bank of sombre clouds and threw a silvery radiance over the weird and wonderful architecture of Jollyland. Dozens of the concessionaires and their employees who elected to live in the park throughout the summer and who had been penned in all day by the downpour came out for a breath of air and a stroll along the broad esplanade. Among them was Signor Antonio Amado, who sauntered out of his living quarters smoking a long cheroot and smiling a wicked smile. He was still inwardly chuckling at the success of his little plot and he had consumed a most particular bottle of a most particular wine in proper celebration of his achievement. The Signor's attention was attracted by a conversation between two of the special night watchmen who were chatting in front of the tortuous roller coaster known as the Belvidere Bend. He slipped into a shadow to listen.

"Did he give you orders not to say a word?" one of the men was saying.

"He did that!" replied the other. "Shure it's tryin' hard they are to keep the thing out of the papers. They're afraid it'll put the place on the blink, and faith, I think they're right. It's mesel'

Fresh Every Hour

that won't be breathin' a word of it to a livin' soul from now to the risin' of the judgment dawn."

The Signor tip-toed noiselessly around a corner and disappeared in the direction of his concession. Three minutes later he was talking to the World on his private telephone and trying to make a tired operator understand what he was saying.

"I havea de news," he shouted, "de beega news—de damned beega news—de beega, besta news you ever hear— Who? Wella givea me data man McCart'—Hello, eesa dat McCart'? . . . Say, McCart', deesa eesa Signor Antonio Amado who maka de lions jumpa—eh?—I say I maka de lions jumpa at Jollyland,—well, meester, deres one beega time down at Jollyland tonighta—one beega time—dey eesa try to keepa it outa de papers—but I tella you—deesa wilda men from de South Seas dey raisa hella—dey hava beega fight—dey—what you say? Seet on a tack?—I no seet on a tack—hello—hello."

But only echo answered. McCarthy had hung up. The Signor swore a large, round, succulent oath and went to bed.

Jimmy was at his office at the customary hour the next morning. He hadn't slept all night and he was dog-tired, but his soul was filled with satisfaction. His ruse had worked. Not a single paper had carried a line about the fracas. He had taxied over to Manhattan and had kept vigil along Park Row until the final editions appeared. Then he had chartered a touring car and had taken a long ride

Fresh Every Hour

along the Long Island roads until it was time for him to report for duty. He found McClintock on the job already. The manager was in a jubilant mood.

"Well," remarked the latter cordially, "you stood the test, all right. I've got to give you credit. I didn't think you'd get away with it, to tell you the gospel truth. Pretty decent bunch after all, I guess. Did any of 'em put up much of an argument?"

"Any of who?" inquired Jimmy.

"Why the city editors, of course. You saw 'em all personally, didn't you?"

Jimmy smiled a little guiltily, coughed nervously and then laughed quietly.

"I might as well confess, Mr. McClintock," he said finally. "I didn't see any of 'em. I tried out a new scheme and it worked like a little old Liberty motor. I figured that the story was altogether too good to keep out by any personal visit and I was afraid, anyway, that if any of the papers hadn't been tipped off my going in with an argument would start 'em out hot-foot after the yarn. So I wrote it and sent it out myself."

"You sent it out yourself" gasped McClintock. "I don't get you. Slip me a blue-print."

"I took a big chance and I got away with it," replied Jimmy. "I knew that there isn't a chance any more of anything that a press agent writes gettin' into the news columns of a New York paper. They've been shy on that kind of stuff for a great many years. So I said to myself that if I wrote

Fresh Every Hour

out this yarn like as if I was some kind of a rank amateur, dressin' it up with a lot of flossy adjectives and makin' it read so that it sounded like a foolish pipe-dream they'd size it up as pure fake and throw it in the little old waste-basket. Then if any reporter or anyone else *did* shoot in a tip on the story they'd figure out someone had been tryin' to bunk *him* too, and would pass it up. I made it good and strong, and it looks like they fell for it hook, line and sinker. And say, I know somethin' I never knew before. If I ever lose out in this game I can get a job writin' a series for the Boy's Nickle Library."

McClintock patted him affectionately on the back.

"All I've got to say, Jimmy," he remarked enthusiastically, "is that you're a great little press agent."

"I'm a great little sup-press agent, you mean," responded the other with a grin.

Chapter Twelve

One morning two weeks after the summer season at Jollyland had ended Jimmy found himself in a state of moody dejection in the club car of a fast express train en route from Washington to Baltimore. He dropped into a chair in the rear end of the car and let himself slowly slide forward until his shoulder blades nearly touched the seat. He swung one leg over the other, wedged both hands into his trousers pockets and puffed viciously at the somewhat frayed cigarette which hung from one corner of his mouth.

Somehow or other his brain wasn't functioning properly. His imagination wasn't yielding up the customary assortment of bizarre ideas and freak suggestions from which he always was able to select one particular inspiration to serve the need of the moment. To make the situation more exasperating the last words of Meyerfield kept bobbing up in his train of thought. He could see and hear the manager of the famous "Meyerfield Frolics" as he had stood in the lobby of the New National Theatre in Washington the night before, smoking the inevitable cigar and talking in a loud booming voice.

"Remember," Meyerfield had announced with great impressiveness, "I want you to smear us all

Fresh Every Hour

over the front page of every paper in Baltimore. We've never played the 'Frolics' there and we've got to have 'em properly introduced. I'm depending upon you to plant something that will stir that town up like an earthquake. Get the girls into it some way. They're the best card we have."

As Jimmy slouched in his seat the memory of a hundred spectacular exploits which he had engineered swam through his mind, but he couldn't fasten on a new idea or on anything that hadn't been worked and re-worked. He was just beginning his first season with Meyerfield and that worthy was a showman who expected results.

A memory picture of Lolita flashed into his mind and with it came the realizing sense that her silence was perhaps responsible for his present frame of mind. Since he said good-bye to her in New York a week before to go ahead of the "Frolics" there had been only two letters from her, letters written on the first two days of their separation. In the last she had mentioned, with great enthusiasm, that she had signed a contract to play a tiny part with a road company which was to regale the theatre-goers of the small towns in the Middle West with a chaste little farce then sensationally successful in New York. It was called "Ursula's Undies," and it was a dainty affair designed to provoke the curiosity of that type of male who carries around a pen-holder with a little glass-eye piece at one end. You look in at his suggestion (he's sure to ask you) and you behold a couple of large and lumpy females

Fresh Every Hour

in one-piece bathing suits in what is alleged to be a scene suggestive of Oriental abandon. "Ursula's Undies" wasn't even as wicked as that, but its advertising manager distinctly sought to convey the impression that it was too terrible for words and Jimmy had been moved to remonstrate with Lolita by means of a telegram in which he had rather peremptorily directed her to throw up her job and "get into something decent"

There had been no reply to this wire nor to a frantic series of letters which had followed it and Jimmy had begun to fancy that morning that all was lost. He turned and looked out at the endless procession of fleeting telegraph poles and at the dreary landscape apparently afloat in a shimmering haze of mist which had followed a drizzling rain. He was aroused from his reveries by a pleasant voice, a voice with something a bit "precious" in its soft cadences, a voice that betokened a rather too thick overlay of what Jimmy scornfully called "culchaw."

"Good morning, Mr. Martin," said the voice. "What's the matter? You seem sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought."

Jimmy turned and recognized the speaker, a tall young man who wore enormous tortoise shell spectacles, an impeccable two button cutaway and a smile in which there was a touch of supercilious superiority. He was one of Jimmy's pet aversions, a highbrow press agent—J. Herbert Denby by name—who was "doing a little special literary

Fresh Every Hour

work," as he himself described it, ahead of a company that was presenting a repertoire of dank and morbid Scandinavian plays on tour. He had been associate editor of a literary magazine and had written a number of choice essays on what he called the "new movement in the theatre" which had been published in more or less obscure periodicals and which had been undoubtedly unread by a vast multitude of persons. He was now enjoying his first experience in the business world of the theatre and he had met Jimmy a few nights before in Washington. His abysmal ignorance of practicalities had aroused a sympathetic feeling in the latter which had been later completely dissipated by his patronizing manner. His company was to be Jimmy's "opposition" in Baltimore, and he was journeying there on the same errand that Jimmy was.

"Good morning," grunted Jimmy. "What's that you say?"

"I say that you seem sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought," responded Mr. Denby, sitting down in the next chair with great deliberation and carefully disposing of the tails of his coat. "By that I mean that you seem lost in abstraction, as it were."

"Not as it were," replied Jimmy. "As it is. I'm certainly lost in abstraction all right, all right, only I never called it that before. The old idea box ain't workin' right. It's back firin' on me."

"What's the problem?" asked Mr. Denby judi-

Fresh Every Hour

cially. "Maybe I can be of some slight assistance. We represent opposite poles of the world of the theatre, but an interchange of thought may clear up the situation."

"The problem is one that can't be cleared up by a flossy little piece of writin' marked 'not duplicated in your city,' old scout," replied Jimmy disconsolately. "Essays ain't any more use in this situation than curry combs in a garage."

"But perhaps I may be able to venture a practical suggestion that might be of value," persisted the other.

"Practical suggestion!" snorted Jimmy. "Not a chance. You fellows are all right, I guess, for this Ibsen stuff, but you don't know anything about girl shows, not a single, little thing."

"I presume you mean the chorus girls," suggested Mr. Denby. "Do you wish to use them in some way for publicity purposes?"

"You're talking," said Jimmy. "I not only wish to I've got to. I've got to smear 'em over the front pages of all the papers in Baltimore to keep my job. And, believe me, Baltimore is some tight town when it comes to handin' out space for the showshops. The lid's on and you've got to murder someone to get it off."

Mr. J. Herbert Denby cocked his head at a thoughtful angle and gazed judicially through his spectacles.

"It mightn't be a bad idea," he said finally, weighing every word carefully, "to get a delegation of

Fresh Every Hour

prominent citizens to meet them at the station with automobiles. Had you thought of that?"

Jimmy turned a look of concentrated scorn on him that would have caused an ordinary mortal to shrivel up and pass quietly and unobtrusively into a state of complete dissolution, but it had no such effect on J. Herbert. He simply smiled a superior smile and awaited an answer.

"And it would be a good stunt, too," snapped Jimmy, "to get the Governor of the State to dance the tango with Madeline La Verne in the waiting room of the station and to arrange to have the professors at the university carry all the girls on their backs up to the hotel. For the love of Mike, talk sense, man."

"Of course, they would have to be extremely prominent citizens," went on J. Herbert Denby, utterly ignoring Jimmy's biting sarcasm, "the leading men of the city. It might be possible to arrange to have them go over to Washington in their cars and bring the young ladies to Baltimore in them instead of just meeting them at the station. That would add a touch of piquancy to the proceedings that——"

He got no farther, for Jimmy choked off further utterance by springing up and grabbing both his hands in wild exultation, almost upsetting the porter who was emptying a bottle of mineral water for the man in the next seat.

"You've got it, you old highbrow son-of-a-gun," he shouted. "You don't know how good it is your—

Fresh Every Hour

self. You know that old stuff about 'and a child shall lead them on.' Well, that's you. No offense, mind you, no offense, but you *are* a child in this line. I've got a notion to kiss you right out in public."

J. Herbert backed away and almost landed in the lap of a stout party who was reading a paper.

"Please don't," he murmured. "Please don't, I pray. It would embarrass me fearfully."

The stout party turned to his companion and spoke quietly under the cover of his hand.

"Nuts," he confided. "Pure Brazilian."

Jimmy bade J. Herbert Denby a most enthusiastic farewell at the station in Baltimore

"There's a dinner coming to you, old George B. Bookworm," he shouted as he jumped into a taxicab, "a nice young dinner with a little grape on the sidelines and no stops for way-stations when we get our feet under the table. See you later, old dear."

Chapter Thirteen

Jimmy arrived at the Lyric Theatre in that glow of exultant feeling which every great artist should feel when driven to accomplishment by the urge of a great imaginative idea. He dashed through the lobby, pushed his way through a swinging door adjoining the ticket window marked "Manager's Office" and leaned over a desk at which was seated a slender man with what might be called the old-young face, a face on which disillusionment and blase boredom seemed indelibly stamped. This was George Seymour, manager of the theatre, popularly known among traveling press agents as the "human icicle" because of his inborn and inherent distaste for humanity as a whole and for publicity men in particular. Mr. Seymour was going over a set of plans for the remodeling of the entrance of the theatre with an architect, and seemed supremely busy, but this little detail didn't phase Jimmy.

"Well, Georgie, old man," he said breezily, "here we are back again and this time we've brought the big idea along for a little visit. I want you to meet him."

He slipped his hat down on the blueprint in front of Mr. Seymour, completely obliterating the graceful outlines of the architect's new front elevation

Fresh Every Hour

and swung himself up to a seat on the edge of the desk. A dangerous glint crept into Mr. Seymour's eyes as he unconsciously fingered a heavy brass paperweight to the right of Jimmy's hat.

"Perhaps," he said in a voice whose quiet intensity was deadly in its menace, "perhaps you may not have noticed that I'm busy, Mr. Martin. I'm not interested in any big ideas just now except the one I'm discussing with this gentleman."

"Forget that," said Jimmy jauntily, pulling a cigar out of his pocket and lighting it while Mr. Seymour glowered at him. "That's just an old blueprint for some improvement or other that can wait. My big idea can't wait. I've got to put it over right now. And you've got to help me."

Mr. Seymour's architect, a precise man unused to such unceremonious business methods, laughed quietly.

"I guess, Seymour," he said, "you'd better hear what he has to say. I've got a few minutes to spare. I'll go into the next room. Persistence seems to be this gentleman's middle name."

Mr. Seymour, loathe to give in, looked around helplessly. Jimmy leaned over and deftly flecked a bit of cigar ashes from the lapel of the manager's coat, a manoeuvre which sent his stock down ten points more.

"Stick around, old man," he said pleasantly to the architect. "I don't mind if you hear what I've got to say and I'm sure Georgie won't either."

"Don't Georgie me, my friend," replied Seymour,

Fresh Every Hour

"state your business and get it over with. The only way I can get rid of you without calling for the police, I suppose, is to listen to you."

"Well, it's this way," said Jimmie eagerly. "I've got to smear the Frolics girls all over the front page of one of your newspapers, and I've got an idea how to do it. Now don't stop and pull that 'it can't be done' gag on me. That's the pet line of every house manager from Bangor, Maine, to San Diego. Every time you spring a new one they throw up their mitts and tell you that 'it can't be done.' Clean the sand out of your running gear and go along with me on this one for once in your life."

Mr. Seymour raised a protesting hand and tried to break in, but Jimmy rattled on.

"I'm going to pull a story," he continued, "that a bunch of prominent members of the Washington Automobile Club are going to take all the girls for a joy ride next Sunday morning to a point midway between Washington and Baltimore and that another bunch of leading citizens—members of the automobile club of your own fair city are going to pick 'em up there in their cars and bring 'em into town. Ain't it a great little idea?"

A sardonic smile brightened the face of the cynical Mr. Seymour.

"It's certainly a great little idea, Mr. Martin," he said, "and I have no doubt that all the city editors in town will be so grateful to you for letting them in on the story that they will have gold medals struck off commemorating the event."

Fresh Every Hour

The underlying sarcasm of this speech did not check Jimmy's enthusiasm.

"Of course, someone will have to stand for the story," he said. "I'm not going up cold to any paper with a yarn like that and expect 'em to fall for it, without some confirmation. What I want you to do is to tip me off to some friend of yours, some nice, agreeable party who's a member of the club and whose name carries a lot of class, a party who's a good enough scout to help a fellow in a pinch. I'll talk him into standing for the yarn, and slipping me a list of names. Can't you suggest someone?"

Mr. Seymour's eyes gleamed maliciously. He leaned over and grasped Jimmy's arm in a pretense of great friendliness.

"I know just the man," he said, "just the man."

"Well, spill his name," replied Jimmy. "I'll get to him before lunch."

"Donald McDonald's the man," said Mr. Seymour. "He's the vice-president of the club and the president of the Merchant's Trust Company. He's a jovial, jolly, good fellow who'd be tickled to death to stand for a stunt like that. Just mention my name. There's no doubt in the world, but what he'll help us out. Is there, Larabee?"

Mr. Larabee, the architect, who was having a desperate time trying to smother a chuckle, assumed an expression of great wisdom and remarked:

Fresh Every Hour

"You couldn't have suggested a better choice, Seymour."

"His office is on the eleventh floor of the Merchants' Trust building," broke in Seymour. "Two blocks down and one block to the right."

Jimmy jumped down from the desk, jabbed on his hat and started for the door.

"Thanks, fellows, for the tip," he called back over his shoulder. "I'll see you in a little while."

As the door swung after him Seymour turned to Larabee and burst into a Mephistophelian laugh that would have been a credit to the late Lewis Morrison.

"Larabee," he said. "They'll pick him up in pieces down on Eleventh street just two minutes after he hits McDonald's office. Can you imagine anyone going to that old boy with a fool proposition like that? Can you imagine it!"

"You certainly picked the last man in the world," agreed Larabee. "Chorus girls and automobiles to meet 'em and a theatrical press agent. My God, Seymour, I really believe he won't live long enough to even tell the doctor his name."

It was mid-afternoon when Jimmy Martin returned to the Lyric Theatre. He breezed into George Seymour's office with a grin on his face and an air of assurance that rather flabbergasted the manager.

"Well, Georgie," he said, "you certainly gave me the right dope. I landed buttered side up. Fine

Fresh Every Hour

fellow, McDonald. Great personality. Best little old scout I've met in years."

"You *saw* him?" gasped Seymour incredulously.

"Saw him?" echoed Jimmy. "I should say I did. I lunched with him over at the Bankers' Club and I've been out for a ride on the boulevard with him in his car. Fixed me up all right and he's going to stand for everything."

"What brand of dope is that you use, Martin?" inquired the manager sarcastically. "I'd like to recommend it to some of my friends."

"Come down off the flying rings, Georgie," retorted Jimmy. "What are you up in the air about? Didn't you sic me onto him and didn't he run to form just as you said he would. How's this for a reception committee?"

Jimmy reached in his coat pocket and drew out a folded piece of paper.

"Some class to that bird," he said. "He had the little old stenographer write it out for me. Here's the names: Jonathan Wilde, president of the Kewanee Packing Company; Judson Davis, secretary and general manager of the Twistwool Knitting Company; Horace Chadwick, president of the Oystermen's First National Bank; Col. Hannibal Roundtree, president of the Carrollton Country Club; Jefferson Tait, retired gentleman; Henry Quinby Blugsden, Maximilian Hendricks, Marshall"

"Stop," shouted Seymour. "You mean to tell me that McDonald gave you that list of names and said he'd stand for it?"

Fresh Every Hour

"You can play that three ways, Georgie," responded Jimmy, shoving the paper under the other's nose. "There's the list on his own personal stationery. This is the reception committee that's going to motor out Sunday morning to bring our flossy frails into your beautiful city. At least my friend McDonald says they are and of course, I've got to take his word. So have the papers. I gather he's some important person."

"Of course he is," replied the dazed manager. "Of course he is—one of the biggest citizens in town. And that list—why that list just reeks with distinction. I can't understand it. That crowd meeting chorus girls? Why the idea is—well, it's just impossible. That's the only word!"

"Gosh, if that's the way you feel about it the darned thing must be going to develop into a bear of a story. Speaking for myself, I never met up with old James K. Impossible. He doesn't belong to any of my clubs and whenever I think I see him coming I duck up a side street."

"If you get any paper to stand for that story," said Seymour, "it'll stir up the whole town."

"That's where I belong," replied the press agent jauntily. "Stirring up towns is one of the best little things I do. Choose your exit door, Georgie. I'm going to plant this yarn tonight and the intense excitement will begin to develop in the morning."

He swung briskly out of the office and Seymour sat down, tried to figure the thing out. Somehow he couldn't.

Chapter Fourteen

Nick Jennings, night city editor of the Baltimore Bulletin, stifled a yawn, stretched his arms, stood up and lounged over to the copy desk. He was utterly unlike the city editor of fiction. He was a short, stocky person with a round and jovial face and there wasn't a trace of the fabulous steely glint in his grey eyes.

"Not a line of stuff worth sending up," he observed to Tom North, the head copy-reader. "Unless something breaks the local end of the old sheet tomorrow is going to be about as interesting as a seed catalog. I've marked Milligan's story on the food inspection scandal for a two column head, but it's pretty dead stuff. Got an idea?"

Tom North shook his head.

"I thought for a minute there might be a feature in that North Side Woman's Club resolution protesting against the psycho-analysis movement," he said, "but I didn't suggest it to you because that Arline Dupont Maxwell introduced it. That dame can cook up more schemes to get her name on the front page than any three prima donnas I know of. There isn't anything else that's worth wasting good ink on."

The city editor yawned again and looked at the clock. It was after ten.

Fresh Every Hour

"It's tough turkey," he rejoined. "I'll bet you there was more news stirring out in Twisted Twig, Oregon, today than in this burg."

An office boy touched him on the arm and handed him a card. He looked at it, hesitated for a second or two and then remarked:

"I'll take a look at that bird. Send him in."

He turned to his co-worker again.

"Zip goes another resolution," he said with a half-laugh. "I'm going to see a press agent. I'll take any kind of a chance on a night like this. Persistent gink. Sent in his card an hour ago and I turned him down flat. Now he sends it in again marked 'absolutely imperative I see you—great story with a local angle.'"

He had just settled himself again at his desk when Jimmy Martin swung through the city room and greeted him with an expansive smile.

"Well, Mr. Martin?" grunted Jennings interrogatively as he bent over a page of typewritten copy on his desk in simulation of great pre-occupation.

"Mr. Jennings," began Jimmy eagerly, "I've got a great story with a local angle, a story that'll stir this little old town up considerable and then some."

"Uh, uh," said the city editor, never looking up.

There wasn't the slightest trace of interest in Jennings' attitude and Jimmy felt his own enthusiasm flagging for just a moment. Cold-blooded fish, these city editors, he said to himself, always afraid someone is going to put one over on them.

"You see, Mr. Jennings," he resumed, "I'm with

Fresh Every Hour

Meyerfields' Frolics. We play the Lyric next week and——

"I saw your card," snapped Jennings. "What's the finale?"

"Well, I just heard tonight that the Baltimore Automobile Club is going to pull off a little private stunt next Sunday—sort of under cover. Someone slipped me a hot tip. I made the chairman of the committee in charge cough up. A bunch of the prominent members are going to pick up the girls of our show in a flock of cars over at Annapolis Junction and bring 'em into town. It's a cooperative stunt they're pulling off with the Washington club. The fellows from the capital are going to bring 'em as far as the Junction and——

"Nothing doing," broke in the city editor.

"But it isn't a fake," persisted Jimmy eagerly, "it's dead on the level. I've got the names of the reception committee with me. The chairman had his stenographer write them out for me."

He shoved his typewritten list across the desk directly under Jennings' hand. The latter looked up in annoyance, started to push it back, caught the name on the letterhead and gave the paper a cursory glance. He looked up again.

"Been looking through Seymour's copy of the Blue Book, eh?" he remarked testily. "Where'd you dig up this letter head?"

"I'm telling you that Mr. McDonald had his stenographer write it out for me. I don't ask you to believe me, Mr. Jennings. Mr. McDonald said you

Fresh Every Hour

could call him up before eleven. I'm not trying to steer you wrong."

The fierce intensity of Jimmy's voice and manner caused the skeptical Jennings to bore him with a searching look. His eyes dropped to the paper again. He skimmed through the names. What if by some queer quirk the story was really true? Donald McDonald, Horace Chadwick, Col. Roundtree and all those others joy-riding with chorus girls under the official auspices of the Automobile Club—why, the thing would rock the town like an earthquake! And the fellow had said McDonald would verify the story. Why had he taken a chance and said that if it wasn't true? It was an easy matter to reach McDonald. He looked up warily.

"Been spilling this story any place else?", he asked.

"Not a syllable. It's exclusive for you if you promise to use it. Of course, if you don't I'll have to drop in over at the Gazette office. It's too good to waste."

Jennings seemed to look through Jimmy for a full half minute while he pondered deeply.

"Young man," he said finally. "I'm going to investigate this little yarn, but let me tell you that if it turns out to be a fake, I'll have you deported as an undesirable alien."

He turned his gaze towards the little group of reporters on the other side of the room grinding

Fresh Every Hour

out copy to the tune played by a dozen clicking typewriters.

"Crandall," he called out, "I've got a story for you to look up."

Jimmy effaced himself as the Bulletin's star feature writer jumped up briskly in response to his chief's summons,

Chapter Fifteen

The Horace Chadwicks were breakfasting in their stately old colonial home in the environs of the city. The shrill song of twittering robins came through the half-open windows on a gentle spring breeze and the morning sunlight flooded the room. A benign spirit of peace and domestic tranquility seemed to brood over the scene. Mr. Chadwick, a solid and substantial looking man of fifty-five, was supping his coffee and glancing through the financial columns of the Gazette. Mrs. Chadwick had finished her grape-fruit and had just picked up the Bulletin. She was a matronly person whose ample bosom seemed to be but the continuation of a rippling series of superfluous chins. She carried herself, even in her morning negligee, with that air of conscious rectitude and commanding importance which she felt to be fitting for a prominent banker's wife who was a member of three important women's clubs, secretary of the anti-cigarette section of the local branch of the W. C. T. U., vice-president of the Baltimore chapter of the League Opposed to Woman's Suffrage and chairman of the Advisory Committee to the State Board of Moving Picture Censors.

If Mr. Chadwick hadn't been deeply immersed in the Gazette's account of the proposed merger

Fresh Every Hour

of certain copper interests he might have noticed gathering storm clouds a few feet away, but he was blissfully unconscious of any impending catastrophe. Screened by his paper he had no inkling of the passing train of emotions that were registered upon the extensive facial areas of the partner of his joys. Amazement, incredulity, bewilderment, chagrin, unholy rage—all of these feelings were depicted upon the countenance of Mrs. Chadwick and were succeeded in turn, by an expression of scornful calm that was pregnant with possibilities of a most unpleasant nature. She laid down the Bulletin, removed her glasses and addressed her husband in a voice that was cold and menacing.

"What car do you propose using Sunday, Horace?" she asked.

"What's that?", said Mr. Chadwick looking around his newspaper. "What car? Sunday? Oh, I guess I'll take the new touring car out?"

"Don't you think the limousine would be better?", she continued in an even voice. "More sheltered, more screened from the public gaze as it were?"

"More screened from the public gaze?", he repeated. "What are you getting at, Elizabeth? No limousine for me if this weather keeps up. Wonderful morning, my dear, a wonderful morning. I'll bet the crocuses sprouted three inches over night. A few more days like this and I'll peel a half dozen years off. Nothing like spring to put life into you, my dear, nothing like it."

Fresh Every Hour

"Nothing like spring to make foolish nincompoops out of a lot of old men," corrected Mrs. Chadwick in a voice that was positively glacial.

Something in the tone of it stirred her husband's curiosity. He put down his paper and looked up quickly.

"What are you talking about, Elizabeth?" he inquired sharply.

"I suppose Colonel Roundtree has picked a blonde," went on Mrs. Chadwick icily, utterly ignoring his question. "Have you decided on a brunette, Horace?"

"Blondes—brunettes?" murmured Mr. Chadwick hazily. "Have I decided—say, Elizabeth, what's got into you?"

"I dare say brunettes are a little too seriously inclined for you," ran on his wife in the same even, ironic tone. "Blondes are livelier and they have the funniest names, I'm told. Which do you prefer, Horace—Trixie, Mazie or Delphine?"

Mr. Chadwick surveyed his wife with alarm.

"What's the joke, Elizabeth?", he inquired with an attempt at a smile that was really pathetic. "Where do I laugh?"

"Into her little pink ear, Horace," responded Mrs. Chadwick.

"Look here, Elizabeth," he shouted, "either you need a doctor the air around here needs clearing. Humor was never your strong forte. There are a lot of sly little innuendos floating about that I'm going to choke off right here and now. Some

Fresh Every Hour

damned old meddler in petticoats has been buzzing about this house and I'm going to find out who it is."

Mrs. Chadwick composedly confronted him.

"A pretty well known meddler, Horace," she remarked with irritating suavity. "A meddler known to thousands. I refer you to the Bulletin.

She carelessly indicated the paper in front of her. Mr. Chadwick grabbed it and hurriedly glanced at the front page. A three column headline attracted his attention.

ELDERLY MILLIONAIRES PLAN JOY RIDE PARTY, WITH "FROLICS" CHORUS

Donald McDonald, Horace Chadwick and Other Auto Club Members Arrange to Bring Broadway Beauties Into Town.

INSIDER SPILLS THE BEANS

By the time Mr. Chadwick got that far he was spluttering like a leaky radiator valve. By the time he had finished reading through the flossy little yarn that Billy Crandall had woven out of Jimmy Martin's story, he looked as if he had overstayed the time limit in the hot room at a Turkish

Fresh Every Hour

bath by fifteen minutes. His face was fiery red and the veins stood out on his forehead in knotty little lumps.

The fragmentary remarks that Mrs. Chadwick was able to extract from the almost incoherent jumble of sounds that escaped from the lips of her spouse during the reading were of such a general nature and tone that she put her hands to her ears in sheer self-defense and sat wildly tapping her feet on the floor to drown them out. The next minute her husband crashed out of the room and through the hall to his waiting car.

"Cut her loose, Martin, and drive me to the Bulletin office," he shouted to the trim chauffeur. "I'm going over the top after that crowd of pestiferous puppies."

Though it was not quite nine o'clock when Horace Chadwick arrived at the Bulletin office he found eight other apoplectic prominent citizens gathered in excited colloquy in the ante-room to the office of Richard Chilvers, the owner and editor-in-chief of the paper. Col. Hannibal Roundtree, a handsome and stately old gentleman with a militant imperial and a flowing white moustache, was addressing remarks to a thoroughly scared young man who had thoughtlessly confessed a minute before that he was Mr. Chilver's secretary.

"You listen to me, young man," he was saying. "You march into that office there and get Dick Chilvers on that private wire of his and tell him that if he's a gentleman he'll drop his breakfast

Fresh Every Hour

and come down heah and meet a delegation of irate and fightin' mad citizens of this community face to face, instead skulkin' in the trenches."

The youthful secretary vanished through a swinging door marked "Private" and Colonel Roundtree turned to his friends.

"Damned, rascally, cowardly hounds—that's what I call 'em. They print a dastardly canard like that and then they skedaddle in the face of the common enemy."

"You're talking, colonel," broke in Mr. Chadwick. "I haven't met anybody I know, but I'll bet we're the laughing stock of the whole town."

"I can't take that bet," responded Col. Roundtree bitterly. "Unfortunately for my peace of mind I have met some of my friends. Why, gentlemen, we should take matters into our own hands, mount a machine gun right heah at this door and keep 'em from gettin' out another edition of this lyin', treachous, no-account sheet."

There were murmurs of approval of these belligerent sentiments from the little group of protestants which had just been increased by the arrival of Jonathan Wilde, a thin dyspeptic looking man with a disappearing Adam's apple and of Henry Quinby Blugsden, a former United States senator who carried the dignity of America's foremost debating society about with him on all occasions.

"Legal measures, my dear colonel," said the former senator, "are, I think, the soundest in such an emergency. So far as I am concerned my suit will

Fresh Every Hour

be filed this afternoon. I shall name the sum of \$250,000 as insufficient damages for the mental pain I have already undergone. Mrs. Blugsden, as many of you know, is a woman of decided prejudices and a strong mind."

"She hasn't a shade on my wife," remarked Mr. Wilde. She's got two doctors working on her this minute. Went right off into hysterics at the breakfast table and began smashing china."

"My own dear Julia," remarked the colonel, "professed not to believe the damned nonsense, but there was a look in her off eye as I was passin' out the door that made me feel more uncomfortable than I have since the day Yellow Boy lost the Eastern Shore Handicap."

The elevator door out in the corridor clanged just then and the brisk step of Richard Chilvers was heard approaching the little delegation of prominent citizens. Colonel Roundtree moved to a strategic position at the head of the group. The publisher—a tall, forthright, hearty looking man—stopped at the doorway and affected great surprise at the combination of wealth, social position and business power he found confronting him.

"Well, well," he remarked buoyantly, "the Bulletin seems to be honored this morning. It can't be possible that you're all waiting to see me, is it?"

Colonel Roundtree lost his voice for a moment at the breezy assurance of this greeting. He coughed violently and then composed himself with a mighty effort.

Fresh Every Hour

"You know perfectly well why we're here, Dick Chilvers," he said majestically. "We're here because the honor and the sacred dignity of our homes and hearths have been ruthlessly assailed in the public prints."

The publisher walked toward the door leading to his office. He held it open.

"Just step inside, gentlemen," he said quietly. "I never discuss business out here."

The prominent citizens moved inside and disposed themselves about the desk in the centre of the room. Mr. Chilvers, who was irritatingly calm, laid his hat and gloves on the desk and faced them.

"Won't you be seated, gentlemen?" he asked suavely.

"Seated! Hell!" retorted Colonel Roundtree. "We want to talk to you standin' up. Why did you print that lyin' yarn this mornin'?"

"I presume you refer to the story about the Automobile Club," returned the publisher. "I'm not aware that it is a lying yarn, as you call it. I've been up several hours, colonel, and I've been doing a little investigating on my own."

There were excited murmurs from the group of protestants at this remark. Horace Chadwick, who stood next to Colonel Roundtree decided to go to bat in place of the latter. The colonel was palpably too mad to be articulate.

"Dick Chilvers," said Mr. Chadwick, "do you mean to tell your fellow club members and busi-

Fresh Every Hour

ness associates that you give the slightest credence to this fairy tale?"

"I mean to tell you," replied the publisher evenly, "that I have faith in the men I employ. I didn't see the story until I read it in the paper this morning. I must confess it sounded incredible. I got my night city editor out of bed and he told me that the story had been thoroughly investigated and verified."

"Verified?" shouted Colonel Roundtree, finding his voice again. "Who in the name of Andrew Jackson verified it?"

"A gentleman we all know extremely well," returned the editor. "I'm going to call him up."

He reached for the telephone book on his desk, looked up a number and gave it to the operator. His visitors gathered around his desk whispering excitedly to each other. There was a moment or two of tense silence and then the bell rang.

"Is that 3459 Parkway?" he asked. "Please give me Mr. McDonald."

As he waited the distinguished citizens looked at each other in amazement. They moved closer to the telephone. Presently the publisher was talking again.

"Is that you, Mac?" he asked. "This is Dick Chilvers. You know what I want to talk to you about, I guess—yes, that's it—hell?—I should say so—I've got nearly an even dozen irate citizens here now and I'm dead certain there are more on

Fresh Every Hour

the way—Roundtree?—yes, he's here—yes, he's a little excited about it——”

An indignant snort from the colonel interrupted the conversation. His associates nudged him into silence.

“Jennings said you gave Crandall the story,” Chilvers was saying. “You did, eh?—what’s the idea? Come now, Mac, this is serious—don’t laugh like that—why if Roundtree ever heard that laugh he’d commit aggravated assault and battery on the spot—y-e-s—y-e-s—well, of course——”

The little group bent forward eagerly to catch every word. The one-sided conversation began to get more and more cryptic to them.

“You will, eh,” the publisher continued. “No—not this time. I’ll get this particular story myself—noon, eh?—all right, Mac.”

Chilvers hung up the phone and turned to his friends.

“Gentlemen,” he remarked easily. “I’m going out on a little assignment myself. I’m going to interview Mr. Donald McDonald of the Merchants Trust Company. He says he’s got another story that’s better than this one. I’ll have to ask you to excuse me until I see him.”

“We’ll meet you at his office,” blurted Colonel Roundtree. “There’s something powerful queer about this thing and we’re going to see it through.

“Mac won’t be at his office,” responded the publisher. “He said he’d prefer not to meet any of you until tomorrow. We’ve arranged a—well, a sort of a secret rendezvous.”

Chapter Sixteen

Horace Chadwick was stirring the next morning before anyone else in the house. He crept down the main stairway in a suit of pink pajamas and a purple bathrobe and made straight for the front door. He opened it and peered out on the porch. The morning papers had not yet arrived. He slipped back in the hallway and sat down on a settee. He had had a sleepless night and he was in a rotten humor. The wife of his bosom hadn't spoken a word to him since the affair of the breakfast table the day before and he had been so unmercifully "guyed" by every friend he met that he had taken refuge in his library early in the afternoon and had smoked three times as many black cigars as were good for him.

Chilvers had been inaccessible since the visit of the deputation and every effort to get in touch with anyone on the Bulletin had been met with the response that "explanations will be made in tomorrow's paper." To make matters worse the Rev. Dr. Chaddow had called to offer spiritual consolation to "dear, kind Mrs. Chadwick." He had heard the cleric intoning his sympathy in the drawing room and had been obliged to stand at an open window to cool off and keep himself from rushing in and

Fresh Every Hour

laying violent hands on the reverend gentleman. The story was the talk of the town and telephonic reports from other members of the aggrieved group of prominent citizens brought word of the continuance of violent hostilities in nearly a score of households.

The memory of these things seethed in Mr. Chadwick's mind as he sat with his aching head bent forward on his hands and heard the library clock chime six. Presently a dull thud was heard against the door. Mr. Chadwick jumped up and stepped out on the porch again. He picked up the tightly rolled little bundle of newspapers a boy had just thrown in from the sidewalk, and slammed the door shut behind him. He eagerly unrolled the package, picked out the *Bulletin* and held up the front page under the shade of a tall hall-lamp.

Della, the cook, who was coming down the front stairs in direct violation of a household rule at this particular moment, was frozen in her tracks by the incisive explicitness of a blistering exclamation which came up out of the hall below. It was followed by murmurs and mumbles which she couldn't quite make out, then by a chuckle or two and finally by a hearty laugh that sent her scurrying upstairs again and down the back way, convinced that the gentleman of the house had suddenly gone out of his mind.

Mr. Chadwick followed her up with the nimbleness of a school boy, waving the paper in his hand. He knocked loudly at his wife's door.

Fresh Every Hour

"Elizabeth," he shouted, "God's in his heaven—all's right with the world."

"What's that?" came a sleepy voice from behind the locked door.

"The blonde peril has passed on out to sea," he said gayly. "Take a look at this morning's Bulletin."

Mrs. Chadwick unlocked the door and admitted her husband. He blithely escorted her over to the window, drew up the curtain and flashed the paper in front of her blinking eyes. At first she saw only a smear of black type and a dancing set of little pictures. The type presently resolved itself into a five column headline which told a story that the whole town would be chuckling over in another hour:

BANKER SATISFIES GRUDGE; NEARLY BREAKS UP HOMES

**Fate and Theatrical Press Agent
Play Into Hands of Donald
McDonald and Give Him Sweet
Revenge After Many Years.**

HE WHO LAUGHS LAST LAUGHS BEST

Mrs. Chadwick gazed bewilderingly at the flam-

Fresh Every Hour

ing headline and at the pen and ink sketches illustrating the story which followed—sketches picturing with comic effect little scenes like that which transpired at her own breakfast table the morning before.

"I don't understand," she said weakly.

"Read the first few paragraphs and you will," chuckled her husband.

His wife obediently read the introduction to the long story which Crandall had written.

On a certain Spring night a score of years ago a certain Baltimorean gazed up at the star spangled heavens on the desolate shores of a little inlet of Chesapeake Bay twenty long miles from a railroad and fifteen from any human habitation and swore by all the nine gods that sometime, somehow, some place he would get even collectively and appropriately with two dozen of his fellow club members who had just played him what he considered the scurviest trick known to mortal man. He had been kidnapped on his wedding night and dumped without ceremony on the loneliest spot in this corner of the world—all by way of a joke.

This same man sat yesterday in the living room of his country home with a perpetual grin on his face and a heartful of joy. He knew that every living man of that party of jokesters was suffering something approximating the torments he suffered on that night of nights and that he had stirred up more trouble in a score of households than a half a hundred

Fresh Every Hour

genuine vampires might have succeeded in doing.

Opportunity chose the disguise of a theatrical press agent when she finally knocked after all these years—which statement leads naturally to an account of the real inside of the story of the projected millionaires' chorus girl joy ride party which amused and startled this city yesterday.

Chapter Seventeen

The advance sale of seats for the engagement of the Frolics opened that morning. Jimmy Martin stood chatting with Manager George Seymour in the lobby of the Lyric Theatre and watching the long queue of prospective ticket purchasers which stretched out to the sidewalk and curved up the street for nearly half a block. Jimmy couldn't resist gloating just a little bit. He had adopted a more or less casual, "I told you so" attitude the day before when the first story appeared, but this morning he just naturally expanded.

"Well, Georgie old man," he remarked cheerily. "You've got to give him credit. The kid's clever."

"What kid?" asked Mr. Seymour.

"That Martin fellow ahead of the 'Frolics.' I told you stirring up towns was a specialty of his. He certainly handed this one a jolt. Do you hear 'em all talking about this morning's yarn? It's the biggest press story in years."

"Just luck—dumb luck."

"Pretty good for the little old showshop and the little old show, though, you've got to admit. Come on, Georgie, act human. Own up that if it hadn't been for the big idea I led in by the hand, little old Robert B. Luck wouldn't have had a chance to sit in and draw five cards."

Fresh Every Hour

"Say," remarked Seymour irrelevantly, "did you know Meyerfield was coming over this morning? He phoned me from Washington last night after you'd gone."

"I didn't know it," responded Jimmy, "but it's music to my ears. I want to be lingering around when he lamps this line. You know he told me to smear the girls all over the front page, but he didn't say anything about doing it two days running."

Jimmy strolled down the lobby and loitered near the slow moving line. He felt a pleasurable little thrill as he listened to the comments on the Bulletin's story. He walked out to the street and ran his eye along the queue that nearly reached the corner. Then a taxi drove up and Meyerfield alighted. Jimmy caught a flash of the Bulletin sticking out of the manager's overcoat pocket. So he'd seen the story already, he thought. Well, he'd try to be modest.

"Hello, Martin," said Meyerfield, holding out a clammy hand and giving Jimmy a barely perceptible grip. "Glad I caught you. Pittsburg's cancelled and we're going straight through to Boston from here. You'd better duck over there right away. Come back to the office a minute. There's something I want to talk to you about."

The manager gave the line a look of quick appraisal as he passed quickly back to Seymour's office. Jimmy followed him, a little shade downcast at the failure of his employer to make mention of

Fresh Every Hour

his achievement. Meyerfield greeted Seymour pleasantly, slid into a chair, slowly lit a cigar and assumed his most judicial manner.

"Martin," he said presently. "I want to talk to you about these stories that have been running in the Bulletin. Now——"

"Some little smear, eh?"

"It's a smear all right, but it isn't the kind of publicity I want."

"But," Mr. Meyerfield, broke in Jimmy incredulously. "Did you see the line? Why——"

"Yes, I saw the line, but that doesn't mean everything. It's just a little flash in the pan, and besides it's dangerous stuff—why you can't tell what would come of it. Someone told me on the train coming over that there was a quarter of a billion dollars represented by the names in that story."

"But that's just why it's good stuff! The more important the people——"

"I wish you wouldn't interrupt me," snapped Meyerfield. "I've got a silent partner in New York—a big banker—he's going to back my new summer show. Why, if he ever gets wise to this stuff you can't tell what'd happen. He may know some of these fellows you've mixed up in this story and he may call the whole thing off. You came pretty near getting me in Dutch. Maybe you have. You'd better pull a new line of stuff over in Boston. This kind'll never do."

He watched Jimmy narrowly to see how that ordinarily enthusiastic young gentleman was respond-

Fresh Every Hour

ing to this line of talk. Jimmy's first expression of bewilderment was replaced by one of great anxiety.

"All right, Mr. Meyerfield," he said deferentially. "You know best. You've been at it longer than I have, and, of course, you know the show business from more angles than I do. I'm sorry it happened. I didn't understand. I'll try and pull something different over in Boston."

"That's it," beamed Meyerfield. "The fireworks stuff is all right, but sticking to facts and real legitimate publicity is what lasts. We'll let by-gones be has-beens. You'd better start on the earliest train possible. By the way, Miss Bellairs is going to lay off for a couple of weeks after our opening here. Her doctor says she'll have a six month's session in a sanatorium if she doesn't, but we can get by that all right. You mustn't let a word of this get out. You understand?"

"Sure I understand," replied Jimmy. "Who's going on in her place?"

"Little Leona LeClaire," said Meyerfield. "It's a chance to put her on in the leading role, but I think she'll fill the bill all right. She's been understudying all season."

"I get you, Mr. Meyerfield. I'll try and pull something different."

"That's the talk," replied the manager, extending a fishy hand again.

As the door swung shut on the press agent, Meyerfield turned to Seymour and gave him a prodigious wink.

Fresh Every Hour

"How do you like my work, George?" he asked expansively.

"I don't understand," puzzled the theatre manager. "What do you mean? I thought that newspaper stuff was damned good, if you ask me. Best thing pulled off here in years."

"Of course it was George," responded Meyerfield with an air of great wisdom. "It was one of the best ever, but if I told that fresh gink I thought it was, there'd be no holding him. He'd take the bit in his teeth and bolt down Main street. He'd begin to think he was worth a thousand dollars a minute. Birds like that have to be held down. Don't let 'em ever think they're good, I know how to handle all his kind."

Meyerfield's office boy dumped a big pile of Boston Sunday papers on his desk the following Monday morning. The manager opened the Press and turned to the theatrical page. He skimmed it hurriedly and then uttered a low moan. Staring him in the face was a double column picture of Leona Le Claire. Over it was a headline which read:

PRIMA DONNA'S ILLNESS' GIVES CHORUS GIRL A BIG OPPORTUNITY

Fresh Every Hour

A story detailing the facts about Bessie Bellairs' threatened breakdown followed, together with some account of the stage beginnings of the understudy. Meyerfield frantically looked through the other papers and found the photograph of the Le Claire girl featured in each one of them with practically the same story. He called his stenographer and angrily dictated this telegram:

JAMES MARTIN,
AGENT MEYERFIELD'S FROLICS,
STAR THEATRE, BOSTON, MASS.
WHY DID YOU PRINT THAT BONE-
HEAD STORY ABOUT UNDERSTUDY
AFTER MY INSTRUCTIONS TO THE CON-
TRARY—YOU'RE RUINING MY BUSINESS
—WIRE IMMEDIATELY.

MEYERFIELD.

This answer came back—collect—in an hour and a half:

MAURICE MEYERFIELD,
1426 BROADWAY, NEW YORK CITY.
GO OUT AND PLAY WITH THE CHIPPY
BIRDS. IF YOU WANT TO PUT ANY-
THING OVER ON ME YOU'LL HAVE TO
SET YOUR ALARM CLOCK EARLIER—I
RESIGN—I'M OFF SONG AND DANCE
SHOWS FOR LIFE—NOTHING BUT HIGH-
BROW STUFF FOR MINE FROM NOW ON
—HAVE SIGNED TO GO AHEAD OF OLGA
STEPHANO IN HEDDA GABLER, BY
HENRI K. IBSEN.

MARTIN.

Chapter Eighteen

A letter from Lolita, received in Cleveland a few weeks later while Jimmy was on the first lap of his transcontinental journey as press agent extraordinary for Madame Olga Stephano, the noted exponent of Ibsen, sent the dark clouds which had given him an extremely low visibility scurrying like mist before the sun and shot his blood pressure up almost to the danger point.

Lolita admitted the justice of Jimmy's objection to "Ursula's Undies," and sent word that she had finally ceased her connection with that organization and was "doing bits" with a stock company in Mt. Vernon. If Jimmy would only forgive her she'd heed his advice on all occasions in the future. Jimmy, in a mood of extreme jubilation, had sent her a seventy-three word night letter and had retired early.

When he bounded out of his bed in the Carlton Hotel the next morning and looked over a copy of the Star which a thoughtful management had slid under his door, he began to radiate gladness and to impart tidings of good cheer. Little Sunshine, the sweet young orphan in the story book, who went around making folks forget their troubles by telling them that abscessed teeth and carbuncles were blessings in disguise, had nothing on him.

Fresh Every Hour

He trilled a merry roundelay while he bathed and shaved, and he felt so good that he tossed a "good morning, kid" to a pert little sparrow who was hopping about on the fire escape outside the open window.

Jimmy had a well forged alibi for his exuberance of spirits, quite apart from the resumption of diplomatic relations with the fair Lolita. He had just performed that fascinating operation known in the patois of the profession as "putting one over." The patient who had submitted to his deft scalpel was no less a personage than E. Cartwright Jenkins, dramatic editor of the Star. E. Cartwright Jenkins was the alpha and omega, the guardian angel of the drama in that corner of the world.

It is only fair to state that just one month before Jimmy's advent on the scene, E. Cartwright had declared war to the death on the bureau of publicity and promotion. He had issued a manifesto which took in everyone from the humblest representatives of a "Tom show" to the avaut couriers of the actors and actresses deemed worthy of favorable mention by the critics of the Big Town.

The Jenkins' ire had been aroused by a neat little yarn submitted by a modest young gentleman with mild blue eyes who had attested to its accuracy on the sacred honor of his grandsires. The subsequent developments had almost involved the Star in an expensive libel suit and certain blistering remarks from the owner and publisher of the paper, directed at the dramatic editor's head, had resulted in the

Fresh Every Hour

issuance of the aforementioned ultimatum. The manager of the Standard Theatre had shown Jimmy the letter containing it.

"We shall accept from the theatre," the letter ran, "only the briefest sort of a general preliminary announcement giving the name of the play and the players concerned. Press agents' contributions are not wanted and will not be used. It will not be necessary for them to call to pay their respects. We will take those for granted."

As Jimmy sat on the edge of his bed and read the dramatic page of the Star over again he chuckled gleefully. Confronting him was a three column head which read: "Defense and a Rebuttal." Underneath it was a thousand word letter addressed to the dramatic editor and signed "Very Respectfully Yours, James T. Martin." Following it was a long piece bearing the signature of E. Cartwright Jenkins.

The letter was a work of surpassing art which had been jointly composed the day before by Jimmy and a reporter on the rival Inquirer who had covered "sports" with him in days gone by on a St. Louis paper and who had a freely flowing repertoire of adjectives at his command that was dazzling in its completeness. It was a protest against the Star's embargo on theatrical tidings and a defense of the ancient and honorable calling of press agent. It was cunningly interlarded here and there with oily and unctuous references to the supreme wisdom of Mr. Jenkins.

Fresh Every Hour

That worthy gentleman was appealed to as "the recognized authority on all things pertaining to the serious drama in this part of the United States" and as a "patron of the seven arts whose causeries are the delight of the cultured and the despair of the untutored." Mention was made of the discouragement such worthy artists as Madame Stephano met with as a result of the refusal of the Star to co-operate in the movement for the uplift of the stage, etc., etc.

"That'll get that old bird," Jimmy had remarked to his friend after the latter had explained what the "seven arts" were. "He's the chairman of the executive committee of the I-Hate-Myself Club."

Jimmy had had prophetic vision. E. Cartwright had fallen into the trap. He had printed the letter in full and he had followed it with certain remarks of his own in which he regretted that the new rule interfered with the "proper exploitation of such representative and distinguished players as Madame Stephano," etc., etc.

The press agent took out a lead pencil and began underscoring the name of his star every time it appeared in both his letter and the dramatic editor's subjoined comment.

"Fourteen times," he chuckled to himself. "The poor old boob."

He stuck his derby on his head a bit rakishly, reached for a silver topped walking stick and started a progress down to the lobby that was a continuous round of cheery greetings. He joked

Fresh Every Hour

with the chambermaid he saw entering the room next his own; exchanged a bit of badinage with another who was loitering near the elevator, and playfully slapped the elevator boy on the back with his folded newspaper. He maintained this exalted mood throughout breakfast during which meal he again counted over the "Madame Stephanos" on the sixth page to see if he'd made a mistake in his previous reckoning.

After breakfast he strolled out into the lobby again and over to the cigar counter. As he pointed to a box in the case marked "50c" each, he beamed at the slender blonde who was reaching to serve him and the blonde beamed back.

"Say, sister," he asked pleasantly, "how'd you like a couple of seats for the show Monday night at the Standard?"

"Fine," replied the young woman. "What is it?"

"Olga Stephano," returned the press agent as he reached for his pass pad and his fountain pen.

"She's that Russian actress, ain't she, that plays in those highbrow plays?"

"That's right," replied Jimmy. "Ibsen stuff, but she's a bear at it. She makes you tremble and she makes you sigh."

The blonde person took the proffered pass and folded it carefully.

"I'll take my sister," she said. "She'll have the time of her life if there's anything sad in it. I must say you press agents are a mighty nice lot of boys. I meet a lot of you fellows in the course of a season

Fresh Every Hour

and most every one slips me a pass just for sociability. Here comes Mr. Wilson now. He just got in this morning. He told me he's ahead of some new play they're trying out for Otis Taber."

The gentleman who was approaching was a well set-up, prosperous looking man in his early forties who looked more like a bank cashier or a successful professional man than the popular conception of a theatrical advance agent. He was one of that distinguished little group of clever newspapermen who have been lured away from the daily grind of news-gathering or editorial work into the pleasant by-paths of theatrical endeavor and who have found the fascinations of the show world too subtle to resist no matter how hard they try.

"Hello, Jimmy, old man," he said heartily. "What are you doing out here in Cleveland? I thought you were with 'Meyerfield's Frolics'."

"I was," replied Jimmy, "but I'm off song and dance shows. I had a run in with Meyerfield."

"What are you doing?" asked the other.

"I've signed up with the little old uplift, Tom," returned Jimmy. "I'm elevating our well known stage."

Tom Wilson looked puzzled for a moment.

"You don't mean to say that you're ahead of Stephano?", he gasped.

"That's what," said Jimmy, with easy assurance. "I knew it would hand a laugh to all of you kid glove scouts, but I'm going to make good even if I am about as much of a highbrow as a bush league

Fresh Every Hour

second baseman. As a matter of fact I've started to clean up already. Have a cigar."

Mr. Wilson looked in the case and indicated a modestly priced weed. Jimmy held up a deprecatory hand.

"Nothing doing, sister," he expanded. "Slip him one of those regular smokes."

His friend picked a thick cigar out of the box the blonde person handed him and looked into Jimmy's smiling face.

"Say," he inquired. "What's the idea? Had a legacy or something?"

Jimmy motioned him towards a large leather sofa in the center of the lobby.

"I've just put one over on the censor," he exulted, as he settled down, "and I just naturally feel a little frisky. You don't mind if I pin a few war crosses on my chest, do you?"

"Not at all," replied the other good naturedly. "Fire ahead."

Jimmy opened the folded newspaper in his hand and passed it to his brother agent with a playful little flourish. As the latter read the indicated section Jimmy watched him out of the corner of his eye carefully looking for signs of approval. Along about the second paragraph a knowing smile began to curl the corners of Mr. Wilson's mouth. His companion heaved a sigh of profound satisfaction and lolled back at peace with all the vasty universe.

"That's a pretty good start," commented the

Fresh Every Hour

other handing the paper back. "Rather a choice line of language, too."

"You said something," returned Jimmy. "I've got a date with a couple of those words the next time I run into a dictionary. I betcha old E. Cartwright never gets wise. Nothing succeeds like the little old salve."

When the meeting of Local No. 78 of the Publicity Promoters' Mutual Admiration Society adjourned about ten minutes later, Tom Wilson inquired if Jimmy was planning any more attacks on the common enemy. The latter yawned in simulation of great nonchalance.

"Oh, I've got a few ideas I hope to put into general circulation before the day is over," he remarked casually. "Old Henry P. Inspiration has been working overtime for me since I turned highbrow. I'll walk down to the theatre with you."

Jimmy's imagination indulged in ground and lofty tumbling on the way to the playhouse. It also soared and it may be stated, with due regard for veracity, that it looped the loop and otherwise comported itself in a highly sensational manner. If he had voiced only half of the weird notions for publicity that came to him, Tom Wilson would have undoubtedly felt constrained to take him firmly by the arm and lead him to an alienist. Jimmy's mind always worked that way when he was particularly exalted. Usually there were one or two of the wild ideas that surged within him that could afterwards stand the cold light of reason

Fresh Every Hour

and that served as the basis of successful onslaughts on the custodians of newspaper space.

As the pair approached the big skyscraper that housed the Star, Jimmy turned to his companion.

"You don't mind if I drop in here and correct an ad proof, do you?" he asked.

The other shook his head and they both entered the business office of the newspaper. Directly confronting them was a huge sign hung over the counter. It carried this legend in large letters:

THE STAR'S APPLE PIE
CONTEST IS NOW ON
ENTER YOUR PIES EARLY

Jimmy stood still and let the words sink in. They bore to him a message of infinite hope. He leaned over eagerly to the young woman behind the counter.

"Say, miss," he inquired. "Where can I get the dope on this pie contest?"

"Miss Slosson, the pie editor—right in the back of the office here," responded the girl.

Jimmy grabbed Tom Wilson by the arm and led him towards the rear of the room.

"I'm going to put it over on this sheet again just for luck," he confided.

A sign reading, "Enter Your Pies Here," attracted them to a railed-off corner of the big office room. A stout woman in the skittish forties, who was dressed like an ingenue, looked up at them

Fresh Every Hour

from behind a table on which a number of luscious looking apple pies reposed. On shelves on the wall behind her, scores of other pies, all tagged, were arranged.

"Is this contest open to anyone?" inquired Jimmy bowing pleasantly.

"Certainly," gushed the pie editor. "I'm so glad to see gentlemen in this office. So many women have been in since we opened this contest that it makes one feel rather lonesome for the stronger sex. Do you wish to enter a pie?"

"Yes, mam," replied Jimmy promptly.

"Oh, a gentleman cook," Miss Slosson rattled on. "How utterly adorable. Do you know I've always felt that there was no reason on earth why a man shouldn't take a hand in the kitchen if he chose. It's only a foolish convention——"

"Please, Miss Slosson," broke in Jimmy drowning out a chuckle from Tom Wilson which seriously threatened to develop into a ribald laugh, "please—the pie I want to enter wasn't baked by myself. It isn't baked yet by anyone. I wanted to know if you'd be interested in having a pie entered by Madame Olga Stephano?"

"You mean the Russian actress who's coming to the Standard next week?" asked Miss Slosson.

"Yes, mam," replied Jimmy. "I'm her manager and I just happened to see the announcement of your contest and I remembered that she's a great cook and I thought perhaps you'd like to have her

Fresh Every Hour

enter in the pie stakes—that is, I mean I thought you'd like to have her bake a pie and send it in. Apple pies are her specialty. Mr. Wilson here and myself ate one cooked by her own hand last summer down at her country home on Long Island. Remember that pie, Mr. Wilson?"

Jimmy's confrere was equal to the emergency.

"I should say I did," he quickly replied in his most dignified manner. "How could I ever forget? It was a poem, a real lyric bit of pastry."

"This is wonderful," gurgled Miss Slosson, "perfectly wonderful! It will give just the flip to this thing that I've been after. We can challenge the women of the home to equal the culinary efforts of the women of the stage. You understand, of course, that we must insist upon your entry being bona-fide. We must have assurance that the pie has actually been baked by Madame Stephano. How will she be able to bake it and how will you get it here? Our contest closes the day after tomorrow, you know."

"That'll be all right, Miss Slosson," returned Jimmy. "I'll get her on the long distance phone just as soon as I can get back to my hotel. She's playing in Chicago and she's stopping with friends in a private home. She'll bake it right away and I'll get her to ship it right through by express. She'll be tickled to death. The home is everything to her. Most domestic little woman I ever met."

"Isn't that too delightful," responded the pie editor. "Some of them are that way I suppose. I

Fresh Every Hour

wonder if you have any pictures of her that I could use?"

Jimmy turned a glance toward his companion in which there was a gleam of triumph as he began to unbuckle the leather case he always carried with him.

"I think that it's just possible I may have one or two right here with me," he said. "Yes, isn't that lucky? Do you care for any of these?"

He handed a half dozen assorted pictures of the great Russian actress across the table. Miss Slosson picked out three of them.

"I'll use one tomorrow morning with a long story about her entrance," she said, "and I'll use one the day after, too. Tomorrow I'll run a picture of Mrs. Jefferson Andrews, one of our society leaders who has entered, right opposite Mme. Stephano's. It's a perfectly darling idea. Thank you so much and be sure and get her on the phone right away and don't forget that the contest closes at six o'clock Thursday evening.

Jimmy didn't say a word until they reached the sidewalk. Then he turned to his friend.

"Say, Tom," he remarked, "you don't mind waiting a minute while I pin on the little old Croy de Gerre thing, do you? What do you think about the way I worked the bunk on Sarah Ann Slosson? Ain't she just the cutest thing?"

Tom Wilson looked at him rather cynically.

"How are you going to go through with it?" he asked quietly.

Fresh Every Hour

"How am I going to go through with it?" echoed Jimmy. "Why I'm going to do just what I said I was going to do. I'm going to call up the beautiful star and get her to bake that pie or have someone else bake it and I'm going to call up Jordan, the company manager and have him tend to the shipping. I'll get her to write a little note in her own handwriting about the joys of kitchen life that they can use for a big splash."

"You will, eh," retorted Wilson. "You talk as if you'd never met this Stephano person."

"I haven't," admitted Jimmy. "I joined the show by wire. This is my first town. They sent all the dope on by mail and I'm going to duck back here next week for the big pow-wow. What are you getting at?"

"Oh, nothing much," replied the other, "only you hadn't better call her up or Jordan either. You say you were hired by wire. Well, you'd be fired the same way."

"I don't get your comedy, Tom," cut in Jimmy a bit uneasily.

His friend put a reassuring hand on his shoulder and spoke to him earnestly.

"It isn't comedy, old man," he said quietly. "I thought you knew all about that ladybird. Pie contests aren't in her line. Now don't misunderstand me. It's great publicity. I know that and I'm for it strong and any regular actress with any real sense of values would be, too, but this Stephano female isn't that kind of a person. She looks after

Fresh Every Hour

her dignity more carefully than most women look after an only child. I happened to be in Washington last season when she let poor Charlie Thompson out."

"What did he do?" inquired Jimmy cautiously.

"Well, Charlie never started well. I could figure that he wouldn't last when I caught a flash of the proof for his Sunday ad lying on Seymour's desk over in Baltimore the week before. It read, "Olga Stephano in Ibsen's, 'A Doll's House'—Bring the Kiddies." I took Charlie aside and killed that, and I tried to put him wise, but he fell down in Washington."

"What'd he do over there?" persisted Jimmy anxiously.

Wilson retailed at length the harrowing details of the yarn that rang the death knell for Charlie Thompson. Madame Stephano had played the capital on Easter week and Charlie had planted a story in all the Monday papers stating that she would honor the egg-rolling festivities on the White House lawn with her sacred presence. The story further had it that she would sit on the grassy sward atop a little hillock and personally autograph one egg for each little child who came up to her. It also set forth the delectable information that she was prepared to subsequently roll these eggs down the hill with her own fair hands for the delight and edification of the young ones.

"I'm reliably informed that when she saw that story in print she had to be forcibly restrained from

Fresh Every Hour

jumping out of the eleventh story window of her hotel," concluded Wilson. "Charlie got his in Pittsburgh that night. That egg rolling stunt isn't any worse than a pie contest."

Jimmy's enthusiasm, during this narrative, had slowly slipped from him like a discarded garment.

"What do you think I'd better do, Tom?" he asked.

"If I were you, Jimmy," said his friend gently, "I'd go back in there and call the whole thing off."

A hurt look crept into the eyes of the exploiter of Madame Olga Stephano.

"Gee, Tom," he murmured. "I couldn't do that. little old Arthur S. Family Pride and I are still buddies. I've got to go through, clean through. I just couldn't go back there and quit cold turkey before my new found friend, Sarah Ann. Not in a thousand years."

"Well, there's one thing certain," responded the other with a note of finality. "If you call up little Olga or that trained manager of hers they'll burn you up."

Jimmy looked sadly at his friend.

"Ain't it hell, Tom?" he opined grimly. "Ain't it just double-distilled hell?"

He stood for a moment staring straight ahead as if lost in abstraction. And then he found speech again.

"I won't call either of 'em up," he said firmly, "but I'm going to let that story ride. There must be some way out of the mess. Apple pie, eh? I never did like it."

Chapter Nineteen

Jimmy wasn't able to concentrate on his regular duties that afternoon. He had acquired an obsession and he couldn't shake it off. The problem of how to make good on his promise to the gushy Miss Slosson occupied his entire time and attention. A more careless or indifferent wayfarer in the field of theatrical publicity might have been content to let that plump and pleasing person print her story on the following day and let it go at that, neglecting to follow the idea up and failing to redeem his pledges. Jimmy knew a dozen of his confreres who would just drop the thing on the principle that half a loaf is better than no bread, but he wasn't that kind of press agent. He didn't know it, but he was really a great creative artist in his own sphere and he got just the same inner satisfaction out of seeing his ideas blossom into realities that a great painter gets as he watches an imagined color harmony spring into life on the easel before him, or that a stylist thrills to when he achieves a perfect phrase after a tiresome search for the inevitable word.

The thought of apple pie haunted him. He just had to have one delivered from Chicago for Miss Slosson, but how to accomplish this feat without notifying Madame Stephano or her manager worried him. He didn't know anyone in that city he

Fresh Every Hour

could trust to ship one on in time and he rather figured that even if he did wire or telephone an acquaintance there the latter would take the request as a weird practical joke of some sort and pay no serious attention to it.

He found himself out in the street peering into bakeshop windows and critically appraising the more or less appetizing pastry displayed therein. No use to buy one of those pies and attempt to work it off on Miss Slosson, he thought. They were all too obviously the apple pies of commerce, pale, anaemic affairs bearing not even a remote resemblance to the succulent product of the home kitchen. His artist's soul revolted at the thought of utilizing one of them to further his nefarious designs.

He exhausted the possibilities of the bakeries on three of the principal avenues in the center of the city and worked himself into a fine frenzy of despair from which he sought relief in a motion picture theatre. What was programmed as a Nonpariel Comedy was unfolding itself on the screen when he entered and just as he slid into a seat in the back row he beheld a large object hurtling through the air propelled by the principal comedian. It struck the comedy villain of the piece full in the face with a disastrously liquid and messy result.

"My God, apple pie," murmured Jimmy to himself as he clambered out into the aisle, barking the shins and stirring up the latent profanity of an irascible looking man who had slipped into a seat alongside him.

Fresh Every Hour

He met Tom Wilson again that evening in the hotel lobby and they went into dinner together.

"Don't ask me about that story, Tom," he pleaded as they sat down. "I want to forget it for a little while."

And he did. The dinner was excellent, the waiter was alert and extremely polite and his companion unbosomed himself of a flow of anecdotes that kept him in a constant state of merriment.

"Mighty good dinner, Tom," he remarked heartily near the end of the meal, "and mighty fine service."

The waiter cleared away the dishes and presented the menu to Jimmy.

"If I may be permitted, sir," he said deferentially, "I might suggest that the apple pie is excellent tonight."

Jimmy pushed his chair back from the table with such violence that he almost upset it.

"You'll be permitted to take a punch in the eye, Mr. Fresh," he said bitterly and then hastened to apologize.

His companion laughed uproariously.

"Still on your mind, Jimmy?" he inquired.

"Yes," retorted the other; "seems like we're hooked up to do a double act for life."

Jimmy had a sleepless night. Every time he dropped off into a fitful slumber he was bothered by a dream in which apple pie played a central part. Once he dreamt that he was chained to a pillar in a great room and that Madame Stephano was forc-

Fresh Every Hour

ing him to devour an apparently inexhaustible pie which stood on a table and which she fed him with an enormous long handled spoon. He choked so hard on one spoonful that he awoke with a start.

At the breakfast table he read Miss Slosson's promised story in the Star. It was all that the most ambitious purveyor of publicity could desire. There was a four column headline reading:

STEPHANO HURLS HER ROLLING PIN INTO THE RING

**Russian-American Actress Soon
to Visit This City Enters the
Star's Popular Pie Contest.**

STAGE VERSUS THE HOME

Underneath was a big picture of a kitchen table on each side of which a woman was shown busily engaged in the culinary operations that usually accompany the creation of a pie. The bodies of these feminine figures had been sketched in by an artist, but the heads were excellent half-tone likenesses of Madame Stephano and Mrs. Jefferson Andrews, society leader.

Fresh Every Hour

One look at the lay-out simply added to Jimmy's misery. After that he just *had* to make good. He strode out of the hotel determined to take a long walk to see if he couldn't clarify his mental processes and get his imagination oiled up again. He was so busy with his thoughts that he paid little heed to the general direction he was taking and presently found himself in a corner of the city with which he was not familiar. It was a quiet residential section and rows of modest homes of the bungalow type lined both sides of the streets. There was a little group of shops in a stucco building on a corner and as Jimmy passed him he let his eyes drift toward them in a desultory fashion.

Presently he stopped directly in front of one which bore this legend across its front: "The Buy-A-Cake Shop—Home Made Dainties and Pastry." A pretty girl dressed in snowy white with a cloth in her hand was lifting into the window one of the most appetizing looking pies he had ever seen. It was a single crust affair which had been baked in a deep china dish of large proportions. The pastry looked flaky enough to crumble at the touch and was a color symphony in brown. As Jimmy gazed entranced the girl set down a card in front of the pie. It read: "Mother's Own Apple Pie." Opportunity had knocked and Jimmy answered "present." He rushed into the shop.

"I'll take that pie, miss," he said eagerly. "I need it in my business."

Fresh Every Hour

As the young woman turned to take it out of the window Jimmy stopped her for a moment.

"Say," he said, "I want to send that a long way off and I want you to do it up so that it will stand the journey—you know, keep fresh and everything and not get mussed up."

"I understand," responded the girl in white. "I'll wrap a cloth around it to keep the air out, and I'll fix it up in a strong pasteboard box that I've got here. Can you wait?"

"Sure I can," returned Jimmy. "That's what I've been doing for twenty-four hours. I'll smoke a cigarette outside. Knock on the window when you're ready."

A half an hour later he breezed into the office of the Standard Theatre with a large bundle under his arm and greeted Tom Wilson, who was looking through the morning mail.

"I hear you've got a date with an apple pie this morning," grinned his friend.

"Here's the party," replied Jimmy setting the bundle down on the table. "The kind that mother used to make out in the summer kitchen under the lilac vines. You were in for the first act. Do you want to stick around and watch me take the curtain calls at the finish?"

"Sure," returned Tom Wilson.

"Then come on back stage," said Jimmy, picking up his precious bundle. "I want to interview the house property man. I've got to have the

Fresh Every Hour

right kind of a production for this little stunt."

The property man proved equal to the occasion, after explanations had been made. He brought out a substantial wooden box and began to fill the bottom of it with crumpled newspapers. Jimmy stopped him.

"Wait a minute," he said. "Never give 'em a chance to have anything on you is always my motto. These are Cleveland papers and this box is supposed to come from Chicago. Maybe someone would notice that. Put your coat on and dust around to that out-of-town newspaper stand over on Superior Avenue and buy a bunch of yesterday's Chicago papers."

When the property man came back a few minutes later and began to crumple up the newspapers he brought with him, Jimmy turned to his friend again.

"Not a bad little touch, eh, Tom?" he remarked.

"Immense," agreed the other sincerely. "I've got to hand it to you. You certainly overlook no bets."

The pasteboard box containing the pie was carefully placed on top of the bed of newspapers and other papers were packed in tightly around and above it. The lid was nailed solidly on and Jimmy affixed an express label addressed to himself. When the box had been carefully loaded on a push wagon in charge of a small colored boy and was on its way down Euclid Avenue toward the Star office, personally chaperoned by the two press agents, the conspiracy was completed.

Chapter Twenty

E. Cartwright Jenkins, dramatic editor of the *Star*, was distinctly displeased with life as a whole and with humanity in general that morning. His professional dignity had been subjected to a series of frontal and flank attacks of great violence for nearly twenty-four hours and the final insult had been handed out by the managing editor who had just left the little cubby hole designated by a painted sign as the "dramatic department."

E. Cartwright had read Jimmy's oleaginous epistle three times at the breakfast table the morning before and had left his home in a fine glow of self-approval. In fancy he walked upon the misty mountain tops of high achievement until he reached the *Star* office and then he found himself hurled suddenly into the well known slough of despond. Billy Parsons, the advertising manager, who met him in the elevator, started it.

"Well, old man," Billy, said laughingly, "I see they got to you for a home-run this morning with all the bases full."

E. Cartwright had bristled at this and had expressed himself as not comprehending the esoteric significance of the allusion. Billy had then become more specific.

"They put it over on you," he replied. "That press agent fellow with Olga Stephano, I mean."

"Put it over on me?" the dramatic editor had returned. "I don't exactly understand what you mean."

Fresh Every Hour

"Say, old dear," Billy had sarcastically responded, "it's a worse case than I thought it was at first. You'd ought to see a doctor."

E. Cartwright, who abhorred slang and those who used it, had become quite indignant at this and had insisted upon a clear explanation of what Billy Parsons meant. The latter gentleman obliged him with one. He pointed out, with great clarity, the trick that Jimmy Martin had played on the astute and dignified dramatic editor. He dwelt upon the number of times the name of Madame Stephano had been cunningly inserted into the correspondence and proved that the whole affair was a carefully calculated scheme for the exploitation of that lady.

The blinders of self-esteem having thus been torn from the eyes of the dramatic editor, that gentleman developed a decided distaste for further discussion of the subject and immured himself in his cramped office where he devoted himself to bitter rumination. Throughout the day his fellow laborers in the field of journalism seemed to take a malicious delight in playfully taunting him. On the way home for dinner he had met the dramatic editor of the rival *Inquirer* and that worthy had added to his fury by remarking, with a twinkle in his eye:

"That was a mighty interesting symposium on Stephano you ran this morning, Jenkins."

At dinner he startled his sedate and shrinking wife by launching into a profane and pungent diatribe on the subject of press agents and announced his determination to start a nation-wide movement

Fresh Every Hour

for their suppression and final extermination. He declared, in loud and ringing tones, that nothing but total annihilation of the entire tribe would at all satisfy his wishes in the matter.

The sting of the affair still rankled in his breast when he came down to the office on the following morning. When Nathan, the managing editor, looked in on him he was viciously assailing the dramatic page of a New York Sunday newspaper with a large pair of shears and wishing for a moment, as he clipped out items of theatrical information, that it was one Jimmy Martin instead of an innocent sheet of paper that he was attacking.

"Say, Jenkins," Nathan remarked casually, "I've got a little request to make of you Miss Slosson who's running this damned pie contest,—it closes today, you know,—is getting swamped downstairs and has sent out an S. O. S. to this floor for assistance. There's nobody around yet but you. I wish you'd drop down there for an hour or so and give her a hand. Just as soon as one of the cubs show up I'll send him down to relieve you."

E. Cartwright reeled under this final blow to his dignity. The ends of his iron-grey walrus moustache dropped a full half inch as he looked up, bewildered.

"Pie contest—Miss Slosson," he mumbled. "What could I possibly do in connection with that, or with her?"

"Oh, just help her and her assistant unwrap and tag some of the entries," replied Nathan in a mat-

Fresh Every Hour

ter-of-fact tone, as he turned quickly to suppress a smile and hurried out of the tiny room.

E. Cartwright uttered a low moan expressive of profound and abysmal woe as he slipped on his coat and prepared to descend to Miss Slosson's department.

Jimmy and his fellow conspirator found Miss Slosson in her office almost completely hidden by parcels containing pies. They did not notice E. Cartwright at first. That high authority on the spoken and written drama was in the throes of unutterable and indescribable mental anguish at a table fifty feet away untying innumerable bundles and humming a hymn of hate directed at newspaper work in general and soulless managing editors in particular.

The small colored boy, grunting under the weight of the wooden box, deposited the burden on the table.

"Oh, there you are, Mr. Martin," gurgled Miss Slosson, coming forward and surveying the box with interest, "and what have we here?"

"That's the little old pie I told you I'd have the madame send on," replied Jimmy glibly. "She made a mistake and sent it to the theatre. It just came by express a half an hour ago right through from Chicago."

"Isn't that perfectly wonderful," rhapsodized the pie editor. "What did dear Madame Stephano say when you spoke to her over the phone?"

Fresh Every Hour

Jimmy paused for a moment before he replied. He had caught a glimpse of the Star's dramatic editor who had turned and was approaching them. He clutched Tom Wilson's arm.

"What did she say," he said abstractedly. "What did she say? Why she said—she said she'd turn down a Drama League luncheon and go right out in the kitchen and slip into a gingham apron, and believe me if you knew how much she thinks of the Drama League, you'd know that was some concession."

E. Cartwright hadn't seen them yet. He was apparently almost oblivious of his surroundings as he walked slowly towards Miss Slosson.

"I realize that," the pie editor was saying. "She has a great, big, generous nature, I'm sure and to think of her being so domesticated, too. Oh, Mr. Martin, I suppose you know Mr. Jenkins, our dramatic editor. He's kindly volunteered to help me in the closing hours of the contest."

Jimmy straightened up and assumed his most ingratiating smile. He had met the distinguished critic only once, several years before, and he was fairly certain that he would not be remembered.

"I had the honor of an introduction several seasons ago," he said suavely, "but it is possible that Mr. Jenkins does not recall me."

E. Cartwright had given an unconscious start at the sound of the name "Martin," but he seemed to have no conscious knowledge of Jimmy's identity. He smiled sadly.

Fresh Every Hour

"I don't seem to place you," he remarked with a woebegone attempt at civility.

"Mr. Martin is Madame Stephano's advance manager," broke in Miss Slosson. "The dear madame has entered a pie in our little contest through him."

Mr. Jenkins' facial aspect underwent an instantaneous change. He narrowed his eyes and corrugated his brows and gave other external indications of rapidly mounting wrath. Also his cheeks paled, and it may be further stated that his rather gangling frame became suddenly taut and vibrant. He eyed Jimmy for fully ten seconds and then turned to Miss Slosson.

"It is my duty to inform you, madame," he said in a voice that was tense with emotion, "that this person is a press agent who will use you for his own selfish ends—a paid hireling of an unscrupulous management which has only one purpose in mind—deceit and rank trickery."

Jimmy started to expostulate, but Tom Wilson gave him a vicious elbow jab which effectively cut off any utterance on his part. Miss Slosson smiled serenely.

"Don't be too hard on him, dear Mr. Jenkins," she remonstrated. "He has been a great help in our effort to raise the general tone of culinary excellence. He represents a most estimable lady, and if she gets a little publicity out of it she deserves it after all the trouble she has gone to—baking a pie with her own hands and sending it on here all the way from Chicago. We mustn't be too selfish."

Fresh Every Hour

"I warn you, madame, that there is fraud here some place," persisted the dramatic editor, "down-right fraud and deception. These gentlemen have a depraved talent for that sort of thing."

"Nonsense," broke in the pie editor beckoning to an office boy whose job it was to open such entries as were encased in substantial packages. As the youngster assailed the box she chirruped on. "I'm using another picture of the dear lady in tomorrow's paper, Mr. Martin, and I'll announce the arrival of her contribution in the opening paragraph. I'm just crazy to see it. Quite a large box, isn't it?"

"Yes," murmured Jimmy. "She certainly seems to have done the thing up brown."

He was the picture of serene self-satisfaction as he watched the lid coming off the box. The prospect of triumphing over E. Cartwright a second time filled him with an almost ecstatic joy.

When the lid was removed Mr. Jenkins darted toward the box and pulled out the tufts of crumpled newspapers. He carefully unfolded one and looked at it. Jimmy caught Tom Wilson's eye at this juncture and winked his off eye prodigiously. E. Cartwright, upon observing the heading and the date line in the paper, threw it down impatiently and began nervously to chew the ends of his moustache.

"We've got old George B. Grouch's goat all right," confided Jimmy behind his hand.

Miss Slosson untied the string and lifted out the pie which was tightly swathed in a piece of old

Fresh Every Hour

linen. She undid the wrapping slowly while the interested spectators gathered close around her. The careful young woman in the bake shop had placed a piece of cardboard over the top of the deep china dish, and when this was removed Miss Slosson positively bubbled with delight as she caught sight of the golden brown crust of the wonderful pie.

"It looks perfectly heavenly," she remarked. "Perfectly heavenly."

"A masterpiece," broken in the hitherto silent Mr. Wilson.

"I told you she'd bake one that would win in a walk," was Jimmy's contribution to the glad chorus of acclaim.

E. Cartwright didn't have a word to say. He stood with his hands on his hips watching the two press agents with a look that still betrayed cynical distrust.

"Won't you please put it over there on that little table all by itself, Mr. Jenkins," said Miss Slosson. "It certainly deserves a place of honor."

Mr. Jenkins grunted and hesitated for a moment. He was too chivalrous at heart, however, to refuse to obey a lady's behest no matter how much humiliation he might suffer. He grasped both sides of the pie-dish firmly, lifted it high in the air and began to turn. Jimmy was looking at him with ill-concealed delight. As he watched a look of intense agony spread over the dramatic editor's face. The next instant that gentleman dropped the pie with a sharp cry of pain.

Fresh Every Hour

"It's hot," he screamed, "red hot!"

The dish smashed into a hundred pieces on the counter and the surrounding atmosphere was filled with flying fragments of pie. Jimmy felt something warm and sticky on his face and he noticed with dismay that the front of Miss Slosson's silk dress was a sorry looking mess. Tom Wilson's clothes were smeared with debris, too. E. Cartwright was wiping apple juice out of both eyes and uttering words that caused the pulse beats of Madame Stephano's personal representative to diminish almost to the vanishing point.

"A pair of damned fakirs," he shouted. "Baked in Chicago, eh, and shipped on here by express! It hasn't been out of the oven an hour. Thought they'd put one over on us again, did they? I know 'em. I know 'em."

The tragic climax of Jimmy's little three act comedy came with such unexpected suddenness that he stood in the midst of the tumult and the shouting like one transfixed. It was a rout, an utter and complete defeat, the most disastrous and the most humiliating of his career. In a flash he pictured it becoming a classic anecdote that would be bandied to and fro by his professional brethren in Pullman smoking rooms and theatre offices for years without number.

He looked up and about him. Enemies were surging toward him from all directions apparently bent on his destruction. And then he remembered Tom Wilson. He turned around. That worthy had de-

Fresh Every Hour

parted as if on the wings of the morning. The dishevelled and distraught editor had apparently exhausted his vocabulary of vituperation and was approaching him with a savage look in his eye flanked on one side by a distinguished looking gentleman with a most authoritative manner who had rushed to the scene from a nearby office. Jimmy realized that it was no place or time for heroics. He turned and fled precipitately down an unencumbered aisle in the general direction of the open air.

He caught up with Tom Wilson two blocks down the avenue. That gentleman was still going strong and seemed to need no pace-maker.

"The first bet I ever overlooked, Tom," he puffed as he swung alongside. "What'll we do?"

"What'll we do?" facetiously echoed the other, gripping him firmly by the arm and dragging him along. "Where'll we hide, you mean?"

Chapter Twenty-One

The name of Madame Olga Stephano was conspicuously absent from the columns of the Star next morning, but this fact passed unnoticed by one James Martin, who had moved on to the next town, unwept, unhonored and unsung. Gone was the rakish tilt to his derby hat and vanished like the roses of yesterday were the glad, eager look and the jaunty bearing that usually distinguished him as one upon whom fortune was wont to smile. Gloom was in his heart and a sweet melancholy pervaded his thoughts.

A letter dated before Jimmy's fatal first meeting with Miss Slosson, awaited him at the theatre. It brought tidings that did not have a tendency to make life more interesting. It was from Jordan, Madame Stephano's personal manager on tour with the company, and it summoned him back to Cleveland for the opening performance on Monday night.

"There are many matters on which Madame Stephano and myself wish to consult with you," the letter ran, "among them being the methods of publicity best calculated to further her interests as a star. Our appeal, as you know, is to the intellectual element in the community and you must carefully avoid anything in the nature of cheap or sensational stories or what are vulgarly known as

Fresh Every Hour

'stunts.' We will go into this at greater length when I see you."

"I'm in for a spring canning," Jimmy observed to the manager of the theatre when he had finished reading Jordan's letter. "I wouldn't mind that so much if I could have got my exit cue in a blaze of glory, but this thing of being bumped off on top of an awful fall-down like that gets under the little old epidermis."

Madame Stephano occasionally varied her Ibsen repertoire with performances of plays by other European dramatists. She had chosen a modern Spanish tragedy for her opening in Cleveland, and the first act was under way when a certain forlorn looking figure slouched wearily into the manager's office and moodily inquired for Mr. Jordan. The company manager, a thoroughly house-broken slave to the temperamental caprices of the star, came forward.

"I'm Martin," gloomily vouchsafed the visitor.

"You are, eh?" responded the manager, acridly, looking him over with indifferently concealed scorn. "We've been waiting for you all day."

"Who do you mean by 'we'?" timidly inquired the chastened press agent.

"Why, the madame and myself. We were curious to see what you looked like. You seem fairly intelligent."

Ordinarily Jimmy would have resented the implied sneer in this remark and would have flared up with an indignant rejoinder, but his spirit seemed

Fresh Every Hour

crushed to earth never to rise again. The surrounding atmosphere was to him pregnant with impending tragedy. He contented himself with a nervous little laugh.

"I've never been accused of it," he said foolishly.

"Of course, we've heard about your ridiculous fiasco last week," went on Jordan. "You've certainly let yourself in for it with the madame. I wonder what you think this attraction is, anyway—a circus side show or a cabaret? I'll give you credit, though. You had a cast iron nerve to attempt such a thing with her. They say God looks after fools and drunken folks. I hope He's on your side tonight."

Jimmy gulped before he made reply.

"Is she—is she a little annoyed?" he stammered.

"Yes, just a little," laughed the other sarcastically. "Just a wee bit put out. It's hardly worth mentioning, but if I were you I'd stick around on this side of the footlights until after the show. We've got eighteen hundred inside tonight and I wouldn't like to have to give the money back. Something might happen if you went back stage. I'll see you later."

He slipped into an inner office and Jimmy was left alone with his misery. He wandered out into the brilliantly lighted lobby and sauntered into the auditorium for his first view of the great actress. She was on the stage as he entered and he peered at her from behind the plush curtains which hung back of the last row of seats. She was playing a

Fresh Every Hour

scene of brisk and brittle comedy and she moved about the stage with all the lithe and lissome grace of a beautiful tiger. She was making mordant mockery of another woman in the play, assailing her with wicked rapier thrusts of biting wit and smiling a smile that struck terror into Jimmy's heart. There was a malicious gleam in her black eyes that fascinated him. They seemed to his overwrought imagination like the nasty eyes of a serpent he had once seen in a glass case in the zoo. He shuddered with apprehension.

As the curtain fell and the lights went up he caught sight of the figure of E. Cartwright Jenkins coming up the aisle. He effaced himself with surprising suddenness by making for the nearest exit door. It led to a fire-escape and he stood there in the semi-darkness letting the cool night air soothe his fevered brow and trying to collect his befuddled train of thought. This last was impossible. All that he seemed able to comprehend was that he was in for the most disagreeable experience of his fair young life, and that there was no possible escape from it except in flight. He was too good a soldier to run away. That much was certain.

When the lights went out again and the second act began Jimmy resumed his place behind the curtains once more and continued his observations of Madame Stephano. It was in this act that the "big scene" of the play occurred, the scene in which the outraged wife reverted to the primitive passions of

Fresh Every Hour

her Andalusian peasant ancestors and made things decidedly uncomfortable for her husband and several other characters in the piece. It was full of lines in which, as the old actor said, "one could get one's teeth into" and it may be stated that the famous Russian-American actress played it for all it was worth and then some. She erupted, exploded, and otherwise comported herself in an extremely violent and disturbing manner. As a final touch she committed aggravated assault and battery on the person of her husband and wound up the festivities by making a general wreck of the drawing room in which the scene was laid. Jimmy watched the early proceedings with growing distrust. When the final nerve-shattering moment arrived and the curtain fell amid a wild uproar from the audience he found himself sagging and he clutched a pillar for support. A clammy perspiration bespangled his brow. He felt decidedly sick and he longed for the comforts of home and the quiet ministrations of some gentle female who would soothe and mother him.

In a daze, he sauntered out into the lobby again. Jordan, who had just come back from back stage, touched him on the arm.

"The madame wishes to see you right after the last act," he remarked with a sinister smile.

Only that and nothing more. He turned on his heel and disappeared into the office. Jimmy leaned against the wall and eyed with envy the noisy and laughing throng of men who had come out for a smoke between the acts.

Fresh Every Hour

At precisely the same time an usher slipped down one of the theatre aisles, touched E. Cartwright Jenkins on the shoulder and handed him a note. The critic adjusted his glasses and tore it open. This is what he read:

Mon Cher Jenkins:—

May I not give myself the great pleasure of meeting you for a moment after the play? I have for many years been an admirer of your great and most excellent genius, and I have had what is called the longing to greet you. I have had the hesitation of asking to see you as I know you are a most busy man. Tonight there is a matter of the so great importance that I would speak to you concerning. Please, my dear sir, do me this very high honor, I implore you.

OLGA STEPHANO.

E. Cartwright smiled expansively. It may also be remarked that he beamed and it may be further added that he felt himself once more securely affixed upon a pedestal in his personal Hall of Fame.

The final moment of the Spanish play found Madame Stephano sitting alone at the dinner table in the heroine's home. Fate and the fell clutch of circumstance had resulted in her estrangement from her family and from her friends and she had dined alone. As the curtain fell, disillusioned and miserable, she dropped her head in her hands and sobbed bitterly.

Fresh Every Hour

Jimmy, having been assured that his nemesis would be on the stage throughout the entire act, had tip-toed back when the scene was half finished. A hopeless fear gnawed at his vitals, but he tried to put on a brave face. He watched the curtain descend from a place in the wings and he saw it rise again and again in response to tumultuous applause. The actress, artist that she was, never raised her head or stepped out of the picture.

After the last call had been taken he heard the orchestra strike up the exit march. Determined to get the unpleasant business over with he stepped through a door leading to the boxed-off scene. To his utter bewilderment at precisely the same moment there entered upon the scene from the opposite side no less a personage than E. Cartwright Jenkins. That gentleman's buoyant air of self-confidence and serene self-approval left him with an abruptness that was startling. He stopped his progress and stood rooted to the spot. The two gazed at each other in amazement. E. Cartwright's lips moved, but he found himself inarticulate. Swayed by a common impulse they both turned to Madame Stephano.

That lady still sat with her head in her hands. As they looked she raised herself slowly and gazed from one to the other. A nasty glint came into her eyes. She sprang to her feet so suddenly that she overturned the chair in which she had been sitting. She swept a long arm out in front of her body and shook it at them both in turn.

Fresh Every Hour

Jimmy instinctively put up his guard. E. Cartwright's face paled.

"You have come, eh?" screamed Madame Stephano, "you are both here. You have come to let me tell you what I zink of you, eh?"

Her voice was stridently intense and her whole face was ablaze with uncontrolled fury. Her accent was more marked than usual. She poured out her words with a rapidity that was amazing.

"You have come to let me tell you both zat you have insult Olga Marie Stephano and zat Olga Marie Stephano does not let herself be made ze target for ze insult. You poor leetle fool, you"—this to Jimmy—"you have meex my name up with zis crazee pastree pie announcement. Am I to have no deegnety. Is Olga Marie Stephano a cook or an actress—wheech? And you, Meestaire Cartwright Jeenkens, your paper it preent zis crazee theeng, it preent it and it make me into one great, beeg, foolish crazee—what you call?—what you call, I say?—one great, beeg, foolish, crazee dam fool. Eet ees too much, oh, much too much. Mon Dieu, mon Dieu—eet ees too much."

She paused, her bosom heaving like a prima donna's after an aria. Her two visitors began to back gingerly away. She looked from one to the other and then there slowly broke upon her face, a smile. It came like a blessed benison, and it presently merged into a laugh, light and silvery at first and then hearty and uncontrolled.

"Gentlemen," she said sweetly when the laughter had died down, "excuse me, please, eef I make such

Fresh Every Hour

a laugh. You look so funee. Pardonnez moi, pardonnez moi. Eet ees just my leetle joke, gentlemen, just my leetle joke. I have here one grand surprise for you. Voila!!”

With all the easy grace and dexterity of a prestidigitator she rached toward the table and plucked a napkin off a dish in the centre. To the astonished eyes of the press agent and the dramatic editor there was revealed an apple pie that transcended in appearance even that famous piece of pastry which had met with such a disastrous end in the Star office a few days before.

“Will you not please take seats,” cooed the actress.

Her hypnotized guests dropped into chairs. Madame Stephano took the place between them. At her side was a bowl filled with whipped cream. Ample portions of the pie were anointed with this by her own hands and served. A mouthful of the delicious dessert proved to each its surpassing excellence. The actress watched them eat with pardonable pride.

“Meestaire Jimmy,” she said, turning to the now thoroughly flabbergasted press agent. “I have play zis leetle scene to—what you call it?—to make good. I have hear all about zat affaire of ze hot pie. I have invite Meestaire Jenkeens to let heem see zat I really can bake ze apple pie pastree. I bake heem in ze hotel keetchen zis afternoon. It was funee—zat hot pie, eh?

Fresh Every Hour

She had turned to E. Cartwright. Concealed somewhere about his person that worthy gentleman had a slight sense of humor which occasionally revealed itself. This was one of the occasions. He laughed heartily. When he left a few minutes afterwards to write his review the entente cordiale had been re-established between himself and Jimmy. She had a way with her when she chose, had Madame Stephano, and never were her wiles more effectively utilized than a moment later when she found herself alone with her press agent.

"Meestaire Jimmy," she purred. "I have for many years been ze foolish woman. I have been too much what you Americans so quaintly call—ze up stage. I have tried to be oh, so deegnified, so very much deegnified. I was mad wiz you, Meestaire Jimmy, when I read about ze pie and when I hear yesterday about ze catastrophe in ze newspaper office I could have keel you. But I find I have ze beegest advance sale I have ever had, and I have change my mind. I am going to lose my deegnety, Meestaire Jimmy. Go ahead, Meestaire Jimmy, you tell ze lies and I will—what you call him again—I will—make good."

"Say, Madame, responded Jimmy, whose self-assurance once more enveloped him like an aura, "do you know what you are?"

"No, Meestaire Jimmy. What I am?"

"I'll say you're one regular guy."

Chapter Twenty-Two

Madame Olga Stephano continued to be a "regular guy" for the remainder of the season, but when the summer rolled around Jimmy began to feel that his enthusiasm for the cause in the future would depend entirely upon an utterly sordid matter of dollars and cents. He politely suggested that a more obese emolument every Saturday night would make all the difference in the world. Madame Stephano exploded like a giant firecracker, shrugged her shapely shoulders and walked away.

Jimmy thereupon decided to leave the uplift flat on its back. He gave in his notice and the next day a summons from Chester Bartlett reached him. Bartlett offered him a place as press agent for his newest musical comedy, "Keep Moving" at a salary which exceeded the demand which Madame Stephano had rejected by twenty-five dollars a week. Jimmy went into executive session with himself and considered a motion for a reconsideration of his previously avowed determination to "keep off song and dance shows for life." It was passed by a unanimous vote.

Jimmy smiled cynically one Saturday night in the early fall as he stood on the Boylston Street curb and watched a great throng of Boston amusement seekers filing through the main entrance of

Fresh Every Hour

the Colonial Theatre. He was a backslider and an apostate, but he was no longer conscious of any scruples in the premises. His cynical aspect on this particular occasion was the result of his contemplation of the sign which outlined in incandescent brilliance over the portals of the playhouse the name of his new affiliation. It seemed to him to be, for a moment, a symbol of his downfall and disgrace.

His smile lost its hardness a minute later, however, and became something a shade softer and more human. A vagrant memory of a certain young person from Cedar Rapids, Iowa,—a young person whom Jimmy held in the highest regard—had crossed his train of thought. It was pleasant to think that Lolita Murphy was close at hand and that when the performance was over he could walk across the Common with her to her hotel, whisper words of endearment, and bask in the effulgence of the smiles which she so lavishly bestowed upon him.

Lolita, released from the oblivion of her drudgery as a player in the Mt. Vernon Stock Company, still cherished a great and overwhelming ambition to climb the ladder of theatrical fame and carelessly brush off the more or less distinguished celebrities who, she felt, encumbered the topmost rung.

She had reluctantly consented to accept a minor position in the "Keep Moving" company at Jimmy's behest. The latter, filled with a pardonable desire

Fresh Every Hour

to be near her, had convinced her that a little musical comedy experience was a necessary part of her theatrical training and had persuaded Bartlett to give her a microscopic part in the piece. In the first act she separated herself from the ranks of the chorus and remarked "Here comes the prince now." In the second act she was the hat-check girl in the scene depicting the entrance to the dining-room of the Carlton Hotel and was called upon to say "think you're fresh, don't you?" to the principal comedian. In the third and final act she was one of the bridesmaids in the ragtime wedding number.

Jimmy, it must be confessed, had begun to strongly suspect that Lolita would eventually find out that the American stage would be able to worry along without her assistance if the worst came to the worst and that destiny had not selected her to snatch the laurels from the brow of Mrs. Fiske. That was one of the reasons which impelled him to suggest that she associate herself with "Keep Moving." He didn't want her to have any heart-aches or artistic growing pains and he felt that she could be spared much distress and disillusion if he were on the sidelines at all times with words of cheer and encouragement.

A smart limousine drew up alongside him and Chester Bartlett, "classiest" of musical comedy entrepreneurs alighted, bringing with him something of the flair of a Parisian boulevard as contrasted with the Broadway manner which usually characterized theatrical men in his particular field of en-

Fresh Every Hour

deavor. University man, cosmopolite, patron of amateur sports, big game hunter and intimate of distinguished literary men in a half dozen countries, Chester Bartlett was a unique figure in the realm of twinkly-toes and tinkly music. Ae he came towards Jimmy he seemed to exude such a suggestion of perfect poise and supreme savoir faire that the press agent felt for a moment as if he should applaud.

"Hello, old man," said Bartlett jovially. "What song doth our troubadour sing next? You'll have to woo the muse in accents soft and low if you expect to equal her performance this morning for your young friend down at the Colonial. That story had a tang that was delightful. Don't you think so?"

The manager had intended to pierce Jimmy's Achillian heel and he had succeeded. If there was anything that stirred the latent energies that lay dormant in the press agent's soul and filled him with the fierce and fiery zest of a crusader it was praise of a rival's achievements. And that fellow down at the Colonial had put one over that morning. There was no gainsaying that. His story about the group of chorus girls who had organized a Back to Nature club and who had elected to live in tents on the roof of one of the biggest hotels in town had landed with a splash and an extensive pictorial lay-out in every paper in town. Jimmy had been nursing a grouch all day because he hadn't thought of the idea first. He didn't permit any

Fresh Every Hour

outward signs of his annoyance to reach Bartlett, however. He assumed his customary jaunty air of sublime self-confidence in making reply.

"I'll say it was pretty good," he said, "but I've got something about ready to spring that'll send that fellow down for the count in the first round. I've got a date with this Emily Ann Muse party tomorrow morning and when she's listened to what I've got to say she'll jump through the paper hoop at the word of command."

Bartlett laughed good-naturedly. Jimmy's dazzling metaphorical flights and picturesque similes were a constant source of piquant delight to him.

"You're not quite as modest as the cooing dove," he remarked, "but you're a darned sight more diverting. I hope you're going to get our stately queens into the web you are weaving. I rather fancy they're on the war-path tonight after all the notoriety their sisters in art got today."

"Don't worry," replied Jimmy. "They're goin' to be right in the little old center of the stage with baby spot lights playin' on 'em from all sides. There won't be anythin' doin' for about thirty-six hours or so, though. I can't open cold with this act. I've got to call a rehearsal."

Bartlett chuckled and strolled into the lobby. As Jimmy watched his trim figure disappear past the door-man at the far end he experienced a sinking sensation that was decidedly unpleasant. He suddenly realized that in a moment of expansiveness induced by jealousy of a hated rival he had drawn

Fresh Every Hour

a check against a sadly depleted bank account. As a matter of plain, ungarnished fact he hadn't a notion as to how he was going to make good. He had no more idea than Bartlett as to the nature of the story that was to startle the natives in thirty-six hours, but he was the original cheery optimist and somehow he felt that the gods would be good to him. He sauntered leisurely down the street in quest of an inspiration.

The walk across the Common after the performance that night wasn't quite as stimulating as it generally was. Jimmy's earlier saunter had failed to result in the production of an idea that was even remotely possible of materialization and he had slowly let himself drop into one of those states of moody pre-occupation which are usually fatal to romance. Lolita, too, was strangely silent and detached and their conversation at first was monosyllabic and intermittent. Presently they came to a bench on the fringes of the park and sat down under the sheltering branches of a great elm, as they had for several nights past. Neither spoke for a minute or two. Jimmy was the first to find voice.

"I might have 'em organize a literary society and have one of those Harvard ducks come over some off afternoon and slip 'em a lecture," he said abstractedly as he stared straight ahead.

Lolita eyed him curiously. The speech was so entirely disassociated from his hitherto brief re-

Fresh Every Hour

marks that she couldn't fathom its significance.

"Who?" she asked.

"There wouldn't be time for that, though." He went on unheedingly. "He'd probably have to take a couple of days to decide and another couple to get his nerve up."

"What are you talking about, Jimmy Martin?" broke in Lolita impatiently.

Jimmy came to with a start and laughed foolishly.

"Excuse me, girlie," he replied. "I forgot that you didn't know anything about it. You see I ain't really here on this bench at all. I'm right out on a sand-bar and the tide's comin' in. I'm goin' to be all awash in a little while if the life guards don't come out and pull a rescue."

"I don't understand," persisted Lolita.

"It's easy, girlie. I've got a case of goods to deliver and the drivers are out on strike. In words of one syllable, sweetheart, I've promised Bartlett that I'm goin' to back the peace pow-wow off on to the inside pages on Monday morning and I've been reachin' out all night for ideas, but I don't seem to get anywhere at all, not anywhere at all."

"Is it something about some old story for the papers or something like that that's worrying you?"

Jimmy felt impelled to make a snappy rejoinder, but his saner judgment prevailed. He checked himself just in time.

"That's the general idea, girlie," he said evenly and lapsed into ruminative silence again.

Fresh Every Hour

It was dark under the old elm and Jimmy couldn't see Lolita's face. Had he been able to he would have noted an expression on it that might possibly have given him concern. It was an expression that was a blend of petulance and of something wan and a bit forlorn, a mixture of irritation and of anguish that seemed perilously near the breaking point. When she spoke again her voice was tremulous and low.

"Stories, stories, stories,"—she paused with every repetition of the word—"that's all you think about. What good do they do? What's the use of them all? They don't make anybody happier, do they? They don't mean anything, do they? They really don't, do they?"

Jimmy slipped out of the silences instantly and edged closer to Lolita. He tried to take her hand, but she drew it away quickly. He was bewildered by her attitude and there was a shade of genuine agitation in his voice as he made reply.

"What's the matter, honey? Didn't you like that little yarn and the two column picture of you the Journal ran the other morning? That sheet's got a circulation of over four hundred thousand. Think of all those people readin' about you and seein' your picture and talkin' about you. Didn't that make you happy? I hoped it would. That's what I got 'em to use it for."

Lolita touched him gently on the arm.

"I didn't mean to be nasty, Jimmy," she said. "I

Fresh Every Hour

really didn't and I hate to tell you the truth, but you'd really ought to know it. Do you want to?"

"Fire ahead. You don't even have to blindfold me."

"It didn't make me as happy as you'd imagine. There wasn't a single soul that saw it who knew anything about who I was or anything except the folks in the company, and they were all jealous because you'd put it in. I didn't mean any more to that four hundred thousand than the printer that set up the type. Oh, no, I didn't. You can't tell me."

"Let me tell you something, Jimmy. Old Doc Crandall, the city editor of the Cedar Rapids Democrat-Chronicle, wrote a piece once about the graduation exercises at the Central High School and he said that I recited with 'fine expression and wonderful emotional control.' There were only two lines about me, but those two lines made me happier than a whole page in Boston would,—yes, or New York either. Do you know why?"

Jimmy, whose ideals were crashing down to earth, sat entranced at Lolita's turbulent outburst.

"No," he replied. "What's the answer?"

"Because nine out of every ten people that read those two lines either know me to speak to or by sight or knew mother or dad and what was printed meant something to them about someone who meant something to them. That's kind of mixed up, I guess, but you know what I'm trying to say. What do I mean to anyone here or in New York

Fresh Every Hour

or any place else here in the east? Nothing—nothing at all, Jimmy—just nothing at all.”

She wound up at a helter-skelter pace that left her quite out of breath and had it not been for the sheltering elm Jimmy might have noticed that she was biting her lip when she paused and that she was holding herself in with a mighty effort. He again tried to take her hand, but she would have none of it.

“Girlie,” he pleaded, making a clumsy attempt at gentleness, “you mean a whole lot to a certain party who’s pretty close at hand. You’ve just naturally got the Cedar Rapids blues again tonight, honey, but you’ll be all right in the mornin’, all right in the mornin’, honey. Take it from me. I don’t lose many bets.”

But Lolita had lapsed into silence again and didn’t reply. Presently she complained of being chilly, got up wearily and begged to be taken home. At the door of her hotel Jimmy made one last effort to lift her out of her mood.

“Paper says fair and warmer tomorrow, honey,” he said. “Maybe we can hire a liitle old gas wagon and get out among the golden rod and the daisies, if I ain’t too busy. Would you go?”

“Maybe,” replied Lolita listlessly. “Good night.”

And she was gone. Jimmy gazed after her despairingly. Gloom entered his soul and made preparations to settle down for the night.

A strident voiced newsboy turned the corner just

Fresh Every Hour

then shrilly crying the early or "bull-dog" edition of one of the Sunday papers.

"Hi, Journal," he called, "Sunday Morning Journal—full account of "Billy" Williams' sermon on booze and tobacco—hi, Journal—all about "Billy" Williams' campaign—full account of both meetings—box score world's champion games—hi, Journal."

Jimmy mechanically bought a paper. A screaming headline caught his glance:

"BILLY" WILLIAMS HITS BOOZE AND TOBACCO

**Famous Evangelist Ends Second
Week of Campaign With Bitter
Onslaught on "Poison Slingers
and Hell Hounds."**

**357 CONVERTS HIT
THE SAWDUST TRAIL**

Only that and nothing more did Jimmy read. The strained look slowly left his face and was replaced by an expression indicative of profound satisfaction. Even Lolita was forgotten for the nonce. The Big Idea had just loomed up in the offing and was heading straight for port.

Chapter Twenty-Three

The Rev. "Billy" Williams at that particular moment occupied the center of the stage in Boston, and there was no immediate prospect of anyone else usurping that place inasmuch as his local engagement had six weeks more to run. He was a sensational evangelist whose campaigns on behalf of old-fashioned religion and of old-fashioned morals had stirred up the profoundest depths of human feeling in dozens of communities in all parts of the country and had brought tens of thousands of men and women in all stations of life to an emotional crisis in which they pledged themselves anew or for the first time to a faithful adherence to the fundamental tenets of Christianity.

His methods were so bizarre and so baroque and he was such a past-master of the art of publicity that he always afforded first-page "copy" whenever he arrived in a city. His meetings were held in great specially constructed tabernacles seating ten thousand or more persons and were conducted with a splendid sense of dramatic values for he was a keen psychologist and he knew the things best calculated to move and sway great groups of people. The judicious and the ultra-dignified who came to grieve or to sneer were usually carried away in a tumult of emotional excitement and were literally swept off their feet by the cumulative appeal of all

Fresh Every Hour

his cunningly devised plans to "get to their innards," as "Billy" himself was wont to phrase it in his own inelegant, but singularly effective style.

Not even Jimmy Martin himself had such a vocabulary of arresting and original slang as "Billy" Williams. His sermons reeked with it when he felt that the occasion warranted its use and even the most conservative of clergymen who at first frowned at such language in the pulpit were eventually obliged to admit that it had its place in a white-hot appeal made to a vast miscellaneous audience seated in an auditorium as long as a city block, an audience which would unquestionably remain unmoved if preached to in the chaste and austere phrases of the conventional pulpit orator. The downright sincerity of the man and the compelling force of his powerful personality turned scoffers into ardent followers and made him indeed a mighty power in any city which he honored with a visit.

Early on the Sunday evening following the events hitherto chronicled a great crowd surged about the entrances to the huge wooden auditorium which sprawled over a lot in the environs of the city. It was a heterogeneous crowd not dissimilar in its composition to the other crowds which flocked in the summer to the great white tents which the circus pitched on this very spot. Most of those comprising it were quiet and orderly—apparently a little self-conscious of the necessity for decorum—but there were, here and there, a group of noisy and irrepressible spirits, all of them young, who

Fresh Every Hour

seemed to regard the occasion as one affording unequalled opportunities for a lark. The doors had not yet been opened for the evening service and the throng grew to enormous proportions with each passing minute.

An acute observer in an aeroplane circling over the particular group which awaited entrance on the north side of the tabernacle would have noticed a little cluster of femininity in the front ranks which stood out vividly from the rather dull and neutral tone of the rest of the crowd like some brilliant pattern woven into a field of grayish tinge.

There were rich purples, bright reds and gay greens in this little oasis of color and from it there arose light laughter and frivolous chatter, the echoes of which carried to the shocked ears of those more serious minded persons who patiently waited on its edges for the onrush which always followed the opening of the doors. Jimmy Martin stood in the direct center of the oasis in his capacity as Personal Custodian of the Big Idea and tried to soothe those turbulent spirits among the members of the chorus of the "Keep Moving" company who were beginning to chafe at the delay.

"Say, young fellow," drawled a svelte creature whose tawny hair glowed like an aureole as the last rays from the setting sun caught and kindled it, "I haven't stood as long as this since I quit cloak and suit modeling to decorate the drama. Where do you get this stuff anyway? What do you think we are—a troupe of trained seals?"

Fresh Every Hour

"That's what I say," broke in a young person with the soft eyes of a Rubens' seraph. "I called off a perfectly good dinner date with a dandy little Harvard rah-rah just because Bartlett made a personal matter out of this thing and here we are standing around with the other hicks waiting for the side-show to begin and wasting perfectly good and valuable time. Press agents always did get my goat."

"Mine, too," remarked a languid houri whose pallid face was set off by a pair of enormous green earrings. "In New York I wouldn't think of standing in line for a chance to see the signing of the Declaration of Independence with the original cast, and here I am getting corns on my tootsies waiting to listen to a fellow that anyone can hear any time for nothing at all. Really, girls, I don't think any of us are in our right minds."

"I know it's a nuisance, ladies," said Jimmy urbanely, "but when you see the smear that I think we're goin' to land in tomorrow's papers you'll be thankful that you stuck along. I want you all to sit in a group by yourselves and don't any of you try to be too shrinking. I want the newspaper bunch to find you're there without my tellin' 'em. Then it'll look as if your bein' there is more on the level than otherwise. When it comes to the singin' I want all of you, please, to cut in for all it's worth just as if Bartlett was sittin' down in front at a dress rehearsal."

"When the trail hittin' begins just sit tight and

Fresh Every Hour

register intense interest in the proceedings. If any of you laugh it'll spoil the whole arrangement. I was at one of these meetin's out in Denver a couple of years ago and when those folks start comin' down the aisles believe me it ain't anything to get funny about. If any of the newspaper crowd get to you when it's all over I want whoever does any talkin' to say that you're all profoundly impressed with everything and all that, and that you're all comin' again tomorrow afternoon and whenever else you get a chance."

Jimmy didn't heed the sarcastic reception with which his final words of instruction were greeted. His eyes were fixed admiringly for the moment on Lolita Murphy who stood near him talking earnestly to one of the "ponies." To him she never looked prettier than she did in the simple little tailor-made suit and the trim black velvet toque which she had worn on the automobile ride they had taken together that afternoon, an excursion which seemed to have wiped out all traces of the "Cedar Rapids blues," and which had left her smiling and happy again. She had protested a little against participating in the staging of Jimmy's Big Idea, but had finally yielded to his persuasive arguments and here she was now, shining and radiant in contrast with her more elaborately attired and highly artificial sisters.

Just then a murmur swept through the crowd; attendants at the entrance shouted "easy, please, everyone," and Jimmy and his group of more or

Fresh Every Hour

less merry chorus maidens were caught in a whirling current of humanity which shot them through the door, rumpled and almost panic-stricken, and landed them at the head of a long aisle bisecting the huge empty auditorium which yawned before them, ablaze with lights and festooned with flags. The press agent was the first to collect his thoughts.

"Everybody make a dive for the front seats," he shouted. "Follow me."

The "Keep Moving" girls couldn't do anything else. The surging crowd pressed them forward and they took the aisle on the run to avoid being knocked down. They all managed to get seats in the front rows where hand-mirrors, powder puffs and lip sticks soon came into play to the horror and stupefaction of many in the great choir of a thousand which occupied places on the platform directly in front of them.

Jimmy, having successfully performed his function as counselor and cicerone, was careful to seat himself a considerable distance away on the other side of the aisle where he effaced himself as much as possible by betraying an intense interest in a hymn book which was proffered him by an usher. He knew that it wouldn't do for him to be seen in close proximity to his charges by any of the keen-eyed reporters who were even now gathering at the press table underneath the reading desk in the center of the platform.

One of these reporters, a curly-headed youngster with laughing eyes, turned his chair around to get

Fresh Every Hour

a comprehensive view of the thousands of persons who were jostling each other in the center and side aisles as the vast building rapidly filled up. He caught a glimpse of the numerous facial toilettes in progress in the front rows, ran an appraising eye over the entire group; smothered an unchurchly chuckle and nudged his nearest companion. Presently the entire press table was abuzz with whispered comment as the identity of the visitors was established.

While the crowd was still noisily filing into the rear rows "Billy" Williams' principal assistant put in an appearance on the platform and was loudly applauded by scattered groups who were promptly quieted by the ushers who moved quickly up and down the aisles, ready at a moment's notice, to insist upon the preservation of the dignities. The assistant was a jovial looking man with an infectious smile. He held a cornet in one hand and he raised the other to command the attention of the great throng. A hush fell over the assemblage and presently the strains of "Onward, Christian Soldiers" cut through the silence with penetrating incisiveness. The effect was electric. When the cornetist had finished he turned swiftly and at precisely the same instant the thousand singers on the platform rose to their feet and burst into song. Another signal and the audience stood up. In response to a pleading gesture from the man with the smile a voice was raised here and there in unison with the chorus. He pleaded pantomimically once more

Fresh Every Hour

and, as if by the exercise of sheer hypnotic control, he presently cajoled the great crowd into singing.

From that moment he held the audience in the hollow of his hand and played with it. Now he would have everyone on one side of the auditorium singing. Then he would be challenging those on the other side to outdo their competitors. Now it was the women who would be asked to sing alone. Next it would be the men. The choir would be asked to sing a verse. Then the entire audience would be called upon to follow them. By the time he had finished with those preliminaries he had the throats of everyone present in such thorough working order and the feeling of self-consciousness had been so dissipated that when he eventually demanded "a combined effort that will shake the gates of glory" the result was inspiring to the last degree.

As the final words of the final chorus were shaken out by ten thousand throats in one last concentrated burst of glad song the Rev. "Billy" Williams stepped through a door on the side of the platform and quickly crossed to the reading desk. No playwright, craftily scheming for a "good entrance" for a stage star, could ever have contrived a situation or a moment more pregnant with dramatic effectiveness or more tense with emotion. The last word of the hymn had died down and the air seemed to still throb with the dying echoes as the evangelist reached to the center of the platform and held up his hand in a gesture which was an

Fresh Every Hour

invitation to prayer. Ten thousand heads were bowed in humble submission to his implied command, and in a voice which breathed sincerity and fine feeling he offered up a simple supplication beseeching the blessing of Divine Providence upon all assembled and upon himself, an unworthy instrument of a higher Power.

He was a stockily built man with a rugged and rather rough-hewn face. Blue eyes were set in it below bushy brows that gave him, in moods of intense earnestness, a somewhat ferocious aspect. They were eyes that now glowed with tender warmth, that grew hard or relentlessly cold next moment or that would ever and anon gleam and glint with merriment. They were the most expressive of his features. They mirrored his moods with uncanny accuracy. The movements of his squat and chunky frame were quick and darting when he was in action and even when he was in repose — which was seldom — he seemed to be literally seething with energy beneath the surface. When he permitted himself the luxury of letting down the inhibitive barriers which ordinarily held this energy in check he became a dynamic force that was almost irresistible in its onslaught on the emotions.

The prayer over, another hymn was sung under the magnetic leadership of the assistant, while "Billy" Williams pulled his chair over the edge of the platform and fraternized with the reporters as was his custom. Jimmy Martin, who was watching the proceedings circumspectly over the shoulder of

Fresh Every Hour

a prim looking maiden lady who stood next him and whose hymn book he was sharing in a pretense of devotional interest, noticed that the curly headed newsgatherer was whispering to the evangelist and directing the latter's attention to his charges in the front rows.

He saw "Billy" Williams look interestedly at the young women and then smile. It was such a healthy, wholesome, frank smile that it was instantly returned by the "Keep Moving" girls and Jimmy found himself taking note of the fact that even the most utterly blasé members of the group seemed to drop their affected air of supreme world-weariness for a moment and become human once more. He noticed the evangelist turn away from the press table as the final chorus of the hymn was sung by everyone in the auditorium and look up towards the flag-bedecked rafters for a half minute or so as if pondering on an idea that had occurred to him. As the great audience seated itself he sprang to his feet with an air of decision.

"My friends," he announced in a voice which swept to the farthest corners of the vast building, "I have an announcement to make that may disappoint some of you. I regret this but my duty is as clear to me as the unclouded noon-day sky. A Divine opportunity for service presents itself to me tonight and I would be recreant to my ideals if I did not embrace it. I had intended to preach to you on some of the lessons which I draw from the disgusting exhibition of prize-fighting which was

Fresh Every Hour

tolerated in this city during the past week and I had announced that I would tan the hides of some of the city officials responsible for its sanction, and that I would nail those hides on the door of the house wherein abideth decency and honor.

"I have changed my plan, my friends, not because of any fear of the skulking swine whom I had intended to attack. Their turn on the griddle will come tomorrow night. Instead of preaching on that theme I have decided to devote this evening's discourse to an attack upon the pernicious evils of the modern theatre,—that hell-hole, that cesspool, that slimy sink of iniquity and despair. Bear with me, my friends, for tonight I may be the humble medium by means of which the truth may be brought not only into your own lives, but into the lives and into the hearts of those more directly connected with this unholy institution for the degradation of mankind."

He paused for a moment while a whispered buzz of comment spread through the auditorium. Jimmy Martin, who had sat fascinated throughout these introductory remarks and who could hardly credit the validity of his own auditory sensations, darted an apprehensive glance at the chorus girls. A few were registering haughty and contemptuous disdain and were sniffing the circumambient air. The majority, however, seemed gifted with a saving sense of humor and were smiling good-naturedly. Jimmy sighed with relief. It was pleasant to think that the Rev. "Billy" Williams was unconsciously play-

Fresh Every Hour

ing into his hand so successfully that the story which was now certain to develop would take on an added value and would unquestionably be featured in the headlines.

There was another hymn and then the evangelist plunged into the body of his discourse. It was a sermon that he had already delivered with sensational success in no less than twenty-three states. It was a fine example of unrestrained denunciatory oratory and it ranked with his other internationally famous sermons such as "Dancing—the Devil's Device for Drugging Decency"; or, "Modern Women's Attire—Satan's Trap for the Unwary Male." He traced the history of the drama from the flourishing days of its great popularity in ancient Greece down through twenty-five centuries to the present day and on the way he stopped to excoriate a long line of playwrights from Aristophanes to the writer of a salacious bed-room farce then current in Boston. He denounced the comedies of Terence at which ancient Rome laughed; the immoral plays which had their day during the Restoration in England and the modern American musical comedy with equal vehemance and with that complete absence of a sense of proportion which always characterizes the propagandist and the special pleader.

He admitted, and rather gloried in the admission, that he had not been in a theatre in twenty-five years and declared that he would sooner be struck dead than ever cross the threshold of one again. On top of this assertion he declared with

Fresh Every Hour

convincing sincerity, that "I know wherof I speak when I say to you that never before in the history of the civilized world has the theatre quite so flagrantly flaunted its indecencies in the face of an outraged public as at the present time." He attacked the defenseless moving picture and consigned it and its progenitors and abettors to the exterior darkness.

Then he grew sentimental and his voice, which had been pitched in a high key, became touched with something soft and tender. He gave his idea of what he felt to be the blasting and devastating effect of the world of the theatre upon a girl who might have known the restraining influences of a simple home in her childhood and he presented a picture of the sordid contacts she would be forced to make in seeking a career upon the stage. Jimmy winced at the unreality of this picture; its unfairness and its gross exaggeration, but there was no doubting that the speaker himself believed it to be gospel truth and that he presented it with such convincing sincerity that the vast majority of those present were all aquiver with moral indignation at the charges he made. He let his voice drop to a lower tone, and there was the vibrant tremor of a deeply-felt emotion in it as he spoke, crouching over the reading desk and bending his head forward in an attitude of eager expectancy.

"Mayhap there is such a girl here tonight, drawn hither by the elusive whisperings of a conscience which was developed at the knee of a saintly mother

Fresh Every Hour

and under the fond paternal care of a loving father. Perchance she comes, like so many of these poor butterflies of the stage, from a home in a small town untouched by the tinsel glitter and the tawdry allurements of the pleasure-ridden metropolis. Perhaps she was caught defenseless in a moment of passionate revolt against what she, poor foolish thing, felt to be the cramping restrictions of her environment, and perhaps she was swept off her feet into the current that leads swift and ever swifter to destruction.

"Perhaps she said good-bye to the peaceful little town, to the heart-broken mother and to the tender, patient father who was trying so hard to stay the flood of tears surging in his kindly eyes; perhaps she went to the big city and courted the muse of tragedy or of comedy and found, for a time, a specious joy in the glare and brilliance of the foot-lights. Perhaps there came to her a measure of success in the new realm of pleasure and mayhap she was carried out of herself, out of her real self, into a lotus land of dazzling splendor."

His voice grew more tremulous now. He leaned forward and seemed to be speaking directly to the little group of girls in the front rows. Jimmy noticed that they were the focus point of observation on the part of the reporters.

"If there are any such girls here tonight," pleaded the evangelist, "let me hold out to them the helping hand of service. Let me beg them, with all the sincerity of my nature, to give heed to the warning I

Fresh Every Hour

have sounded. Let me ask them to picture the little home back yonder with the empty chair that's always waiting for the daughter who has gone out to beat her fragile wings against the candle's flame. Let them picture again the little mother with the soft, grey eyes. They were so bright and lively once, but now there is an anxious look in them. There is sadness in her heart, too, a heavy sadness, but she tries to be brave for the sake of him who sits so gloomily by the fire-place and aches for the touch of a vanished hand and the sound of a voice that is gone.

"Let me entreat you to bring the roses back to mother's pale cheeks again if there are any of you here. Let me plead with you, out of a full heart, to bring the laughter back to father's lips and the smile back to his care-worn face. Let me urge you to fly from the stifling air of the playhouse back to the clean, open spaces where the fair winds blow, where love and tender solicitude await you and where life is real and earnest and not an empty, foolish dream. We will pray for guidance and when we have finished I will ask all those who wish to be consecrated anew to come down the aisles and clasp my hand in a pledge of fealty to the service of Him whom they have forgotten for a while in the fretful rush of selfish living. Let us pray."

Down on his knees went the Rev. "Billy" Williams and as thousands in the great audience bowed their heads once more he prayed fervently that everyone present who was unworthy at heart might

Fresh Every Hour

see the light and embrace again with the simple faith of childhood the eternal truths of religion. The "Keep Moving" girls bowed their heads with the others, and if Jimmy had been a little closer he might have noticed that here and there a rouged face was stained with tears and that hard lines around the mouths of one or two of the bolder spirits had been softened as if by some subtle alchemy beyond the ken of mortal mind.

The prayer over, the evangelist sprang to his feet and raised his hand. The great choir, in instant response to his signal, began to softly sing, "Lead, Kindly Light." At a perfectly timed moment toward the end of this most exquisite of hymns his voice sounded above the pianissimo phrasing of the massed singers and carried, with penetrating clarity, to the far end of the hushed auditorium.

"Won't someone make the break with the past," he exhorted. "Won't someone be the first to lead the strayed sheep into the vineyard of the Lord?"

A tall, thin man with scraggly white hair and a pale ascetic face stood up about fifteen rows back from the platform and slid out into the nearest aisle. He bent his head as if breasting a heavy wind and his cheeks suddenly flamed at the consciousness of the thousands of eyes which were turned on him as he slouched awkwardly down toward "Billy" Williams, who had stepped from the platform and who was now standing at the end of the aisle. The evangelist reached out his hand

Fresh Every Hour

and the tall man grasped it as he made a quick dive for a handkerchief and dabbed at his face. He mumbled something under his breath.

"Don't be ashamed to cry, brother," said the evangelist, putting his arm affectionately around the other's shoulder. "Tears at a time like this are drops of God's dew that will wash your soul as clean as morning roses." And then he addressed the audience as the last notes of the hymn were sung by the choir. "Who'll join our brother at the mercy seat," he shouted. "Who'll be the next to heed the glad tidings?"

There was a movement and a scraping of feet in every section of the building and presently men and women of all ages and all conditions began coming down the aisle to be greeted by "Billy" Williams and shunted aside into the open space designed for the reception of converts. There they stood, most of them with drooped heads and many of them crying. There were a few who held their heads up and their shoulders back and who stood four-square to all the curious glances directed toward them. On their faces were brave smiles and there was about them the air of spiritual elation that was inspiring to those who noted it.

Jimmy Martin's emotions had been subjected to a severe grilling during the concluding portion of the preacher's sentimental appeal and he had lost a little of his self-reserve and customary complacency during the prayer. When the first of the converts came struggling down the aisle and had be-

Fresh Every Hour

gun to weep a little, the press agent found himself, for the first time in many years, struggling to hold back the tears that came unbidden into his own eyes. When the others had followed the spell was broken and he looked furtively about to see if anyone had noticed that he had been trembling on the verge of weakness. He thought once more of the mission which had brought him into this alien atmosphere and he directed his attention to the benches occupied by the young women for whom he was acting as a somewhat remote escort.

The converts were coming down the aisles now in little groups of three and four and the evangelist was keeping things at fever heat with loudly voiced exhortations. He leaned toward the "Keep Moving" girls and made a personal plea to them.

"Isn't there someone here in this group of girls who has seen the light tonight," he inquired. "Won't someone among you step out here and take my hand and get right with her soul again?"

"I'll say I will," Jimmy heard Natalie Nugent, the girl with the pallor and the green earrings, say as she stood up and walked toward "Billy" Williams who gripped her outstretched hand and directed her to a position alongside him. The press agent looked at the other girls and noticed that they were watching her with fascinated interest. Somehow he couldn't quite grasp what it all meant.

"God bless you, sister," the evangelist shouted. "Won't some of your friends join you?" He plunged again into the vernacular, choosing, as al-

Fresh Every Hour

ways, the effective moment. "It's your cue, girls," he pleaded. "The curtain's up and the call boy is knocking at the door of your hearts. Don't delay. You can't tell what moment the Great Stage Manager will ring down for the last time. It may be tonight. It may be tomorrow. Don't be caught unprepared. It's a blessed opportunity, girls. Don't pass it up. For mother's sake, girls, for mother's sake."

Three other girls got up now and came forward. Jimmy gave an audible gasp of amazement. A fifth and a sixth moved into place beside the others and then Lolita Murphy stood up, hesitated for just a moment, caught "Billy" Williams' warm human smile and stepped briskly forward. A half dozen others followed. The remainder sat with bowed heads. Those who had left their places stood in a little circle by themselves, clustered directly about the beaming evangelist. He made a last plea for converts to the vast audience and a stray dozen or more men and women, whose moral courage had not been quite strong enough to force a decision at the beginning, bobbed up here and there and moved toward the platform. There was a momentary pause and then the preacher spoke again.

"My friends," he said, "a most remarkable event has occurred here tonight. Perhaps some of you here near the front have surmised what it is, but I am sure that the great majority of you have not grasped its significance. My efforts tonight have been blessed by an achievement of which I am ex-

Fresh Every Hour

tremely proud. Thirteen members of a theatrical company now appearing in this city—a company presenting a conglomeration bearing the idiotic title of 'Keep Moving'—thirteen lovely young women have been rescued from the insidious temptations that lurk behind the blinding glare of the footlights and have come out here in the open and made a pledge to get back into the old, simple ways of living. It's the most wonderful thing that has happened since I began my campaign, and while these brave and earnest souls are here with us let us all join in a prayer that they may be steadfast in their new aim and that their example may be a shining one to thousands of others in this great city. Let us pray."

When the great throng arose after the prayer to sing the final hymn Jimmy Martin edged out of his seat and slipped unobtrusively up one of the aisles and out into the chill evening air. He was dazed and bewildered, but he had presence of mind enough to hail a taxicab and direct the chauffeur to drive him to his hotel. He had an idea that pictures of the fair converts would be in demand and he wanted to be on hand when the bright young gentlemen of the press put in an appearance.

Chapter Twenty-Four

Chester Bartlett was not given to enthusiasm, but he felt impelled to congratulate Jimmy after glancing over the morning papers the next day and making a mental inventory of the net results of the press agent's Sunday evening "plant." The story leaped out of the front page of every journal in town and dwarfed, by comparison, the accounts of a super-heated debate in the United States Senate on disarmament, of a great strike which industrially paralyzed Great Britain from end to end and of a volcanic eruption in a far-flung island of the Pacific which claimed 8,000 human lives as its toll.

The "feature writers" who covered the "Billy" Williams' meetings had figuratively and literally turned themselves loose on the proceedings and had written stories with a heart-throb in every sentence and a tear in at least every other line. They had embellished and embroidered the actual incidents so effectively that even Bartlett himself, case-hardened cynic that he was, found himself growing a bit sentimental when he read the story in the first paper to hand. The narratives were all adorned with photographs of the "Keep-Moving" beauties and the name of that blithesome musical comedy figured extensively in all of them. Bartlett particularly like the headline in the Journal:

Fresh Every Hour.

**CHORUS BEAUTIES
CONVERTED BY
"BILLY" WILLIAMS**

**Thirteen "Keep Moving" Girls
Hit the Trail After Eloquent
Plea by Evangelist.**

**TEN THOUSAND WEEP AS
SOLEMN PLEDGE IS MADE**

"The counter attack was well developed and the ground gained is satisfactory to the higher command," was the way Bartlett framed his congratulations over the telephone. "You can consolidate your present position and rest up for a few days."

"All right," Jimmy replied with a chuckle, "but there's no tellin' when I may make another raid on the enemy trenches. I've got 'em goin'. That one was as easy as getting a drink on Broadway since the U. S. A. went dry."

"In plain, everyday English," went on Bartlett, "that's just about the best plant I've seen pulled off in the twenty years that I've been in the theatrical business. I noticed that your little Cedar Rapids friend was one of the ring-leaders. How you managed to get them all to play up as well as

Fresh Every Hour

they did is what I can't understand. How did you work it?"

Jimmy paused for a moment or two before replying and coughed uneasily.

"I've got 'em trained," he finally replied. "They'll—they'll do anything I ask 'em to do—anything."

It was characteristic of Jimmy to have decided, after considerable speculation, that no motive other than an unselfish desire to please himself and to assist in adding to the greater glory of the occasion had prompted Lolita and her associates to profess conversion on the night before. He had tried to reach her on the telephone several times with the idea of thanking her for her unexpected co-operation in furthering the success of his publicity scheme, but had been always met with the response that she was not in. He finally decided to defer the expression of his gratitude until that evening at the theatre. As a slight token of his good-will and heart-felt thankfulness he ordered a bouquet of roses delivered to her dressing-room and he personally wrote out a little card to be affixed to it.

"To the best little press agent ever," it ran, "from a cheap piker at the game—Yours with love—Jimmy."

He tried to preserve a slight semblance of becoming modesty throughout the day, but the congratulations which poured in upon him from all sides were of such a fulsome nature and coincided so perfectly with his own opinion of himself that when evening came he was as expansive as the lead-

Fresh Every Hour

ing man of a small town stock company and just about as reticent and self-effacing as an auctioneer. He dined alone with a fine inner glow of self-satisfaction and strolled into the lobby of the Colonial Theatre about half an hour before curtain time at peace with the world.

There was a long line of patrons extending from the box-office window almost out to the sidewalk and he watched the scramble for tickets with a feeling of exalted serenity. The sound of voices at the swinging doors leading into the foyer attracted his attention. He turned to see Bartlett and the stage manager coming through. Their mood was one that plainly boded developments of a decidedly disagreeable nature. They made for Jimmy and pounced upon him simultaneously.

"Where's that girl of yours?" inquired Bartlett in a tone that Jimmy felt was a bit menacing.

"Yes, and where's Natalie Nugent and Hilda Hennessey and Trixie Seville and Yvonne Elaine and Dulcie Dolores and five or six others," chimed in the stage manager. "What do you know about 'em?"

"What do I know about 'em?" echoed Jimmy helplessly. "I don't know anything about 'em. What's the idea?"

"The idea is that they haven't shown up tonight," said Bartlett tartly. "Not a single one of that outfit that put your story over last night has put in an appearance back stage, and I have a remote suspicion that you know why they haven't. Have you

Fresh Every Hour

got some new stunt up your sleeve? If you have I won't stand for it. Understand me, my dear sir, I won't stand for it."

"I don't know anything about it, Mr. Peters," said Jimmy with an air of injured innocence, "not a single little thing. I haven't seen Lolita all day and I haven't laid eyes on any of those other queens either. What makes you think I know anything about it?"

"Just general principles, I fancy. You're a very smart young man and I had, and still have for that matter, an idea that you may be planning a follow-up of some sort on that yarn you landed this morning. Let me warn you that if you are, you are monkeyin with the well-known buzz-saw. Here are a dozen or more of the best looking de luxe girls in this show missing and the house practically sold out. I've got a reputation to live up to and I don't propose to have it suffer just for a fool press story."

"But, Mr. Bartlett," broke in Jimmy.

"Ifs and buts are superfluous at this writing," interrupted the manager angrily. "It's within fifteen minutes of curtain time, and we'll have to give a show that'll look like a Number Three company out in the tall grass. The next time you plan a press story you'll have to get it passed by the censor beforehand and I'm going to be the censor. Do you get me?"

"Yes, sir," replied Jimmy weakly as Bartlett and the stage manager disappeared into the theatre again.

Fresh Every Hour

He leaned against the wall for support and tried to collect his thoughts. Somehow he couldn't. He felt himself in the clutch of uncertainties beyond his understanding at the moment and vague distress was written large upon his face. One of the uniformed carriage attendants tapped him on the shoulder and slipped a letter into his hand.

"A young lady left this half an hour ago, Mr. Martin," he said, "and told me to see as how you got it handed to you personally."

Jimmy knew the handwriting on the envelope and a queer feeling came over him. He hesitated for a moment before reading it. When Matthews, the house manager, strolled up to him two minutes afterwards vain regret was in his heart and in his eyes there lurked a look of blended bewilderment and futile rage.

"What's the matter, old man?" inquired Matthews. "Has Bartlett been making things hard for you?"

Jimmy smiled a sickly smile and handed over the letter.

"I don't mind so much what he says," he replied, "but this has got under the little old cuticle all right. Read it if you like."

The manager adjusted his gold-rimmed glasses and read the letter, written in the stiff, vertical handwriting of a school-girl.

Dear Jimmy:

This is just to say goodbye. You've been very nice and very kind to me and I'm thankful for everything and all that, but I've just got to get away from the sinful stage and go

Fresh Every Hour

back home. The other girls are all quitting, too. I knew weeks ago that it was foolish to pretend I'd ever be anything more than just a fifth or sixth rater and now I'm glad that I've been brought to see the wickedness of it all. I guess maybe I've got the "Cedar Rapids blues" you spoke about the other night, too. Mother and dad have been writing me for weeks to come home. Thank you again for your kindness and all that and don't bother trying to look me up for I'm taking a train tonight. Many thanks again—from your little friend,

LOLITA.

"That's mighty tough," commented Matthews sympathetically. "Love is a great little gamble."

"You said something," replied Jimmy dejectedly. "I held the right cards, but I overplayed my hand."

Chapter Twenty-Five

"They're always pickin' on me," moaned Jimmy a few weeks later as he flung the letter he had just finished reading down on his desk in a corner of the dingy office of the Colonial Theatre and kicked impulsively at a crumpled pile of discarded newspapers on the floor.

"What's the matter, old man?" inquired Matthews, looking up from a stack of letters on his desk and regarding the press agent with a bantering smile. "Is Bartlett out on the rampage again?"

"No," replied Jimmy in a disgusted tone of voice. "I wish he was. He's postin' three sheets tellin' what a grand little fellow I am. That's what gets my pet Angora."

"What's the catch?" questioned the other.

"Oh, that's concealed in the last paragraph. He starts out with a lot of hot air about how good I am and how pleased he is at the wonderful showing I've landed over here in Boston, and a bunch of other junk and then he—wait, I'll read you the finish. He says—'and being desirous of showing my appreciation of your efforts in a concrete way I have decided to intrust to you the general direction of the publicity campaign of 'The Ganges Princess.' I will send someone to take over 'Keep Moving' on Saturday, and you will kindly report at this office on Monday morning.'"

Fresh Every Hour

Matthews, who had sauntered over to Jimmy's desk during the reading of Chester Bartlett's letter, looked frankly bewildered.

"I'm pretty dense, I guess," he said. "I don't see anything in that to cause you to exhibit any signs of distress. He's handing you the prize job of the season on a gold platter. You couldn't stop the papers from printing stuff about that show with an injunction from the Supreme Court. Don't you realize that?"

"Oh, that part of it's all right," replied Jimmy. "I suppose I've got a nerve to put up a holler, but I can't help it. It's this thing of bein' bounced about like a tennis ball that makes me sore. The minute I get sewed up with one show and the machinery in the little old idea factory gets all oiled up and is makin' 286 revolutions to the minute, along comes a letter or a wire shootin' me on to join somethin' else. Gee, I wish I was workin' for myself and not for the other guy."

Jimmy would have resented any suggestion that the look which crept into his eyes as he said this was wistful, but it was just that. He paused and gazed out of the window at the scurrying throng of early morning shoppers. Across his face there came and went the shadow of a pathetic smile, a smile that seemed to express for a moment the elation of holding within his grasp the very substance of things hoped for and which instantly merged into something that epitomized utter hope-

Fresh Every Hour

lessness. Matthews sensed his mood and put his hand on the press agent's shoulder.

"Why don't you take a flier on your own?" He asked. "Everybody in the business would wish you well."

Jimmy snorted derisively.

"What would I use for money?" he inquired sarcastically. "Playwrights ain't takin' good wishes for advance royalties and you can't slip a few kind words into the salary envelopes on Saturday night."

"But it don't take so much to make a start," persisted the other. "Don't you manage to save anything at all?"

"Sure. I've got almost enough cigarette coupons to get a gold plated safety razor or a genuine silk umbrella, and there's 20 shares of Flying Frog copper stock in the tray of my trunk. That must be worth all of a dollar and eight cents, and it cost me about thirty dollars, too. Quit your kiddin', old man. An agent has about as much chance these days of savin' money as the Kaiser has of bein' invited to a week-end party by the King of England."

Jimmy stood up and began to pace slowly up and down the room. The wistful look came into his eyes again and the longing smile touched his mouth once more.

"Still," he said, half to himself, "it's kind of nice to think about ownin' your own show even if you know you never will, and to sort of get a flash in your mind's eye of a twenty-four sheet with 'James

Fresh Every Hour

T. Martin presents' splashed across the top of it in black on yellow with red initials. 'James T. Martin presents'—that'd certainly look immense on that low board on Broadway near Forty-fifth street that hits everybody on the big street right in the eye."

Matthews, in response to a summons from the box-office, left him still soliloquizing under his breath and gazing pensively across the snow covered Common.

"The Ganges Princess" was the dramatic sensation of a decade. It had been running for a solid year at the huge Hendrik Hudson Theatre in New York, having weathered a hot summer with hardly a noticeable falling off of receipts. It was Chester Bartlett's first venture into what is technically known as the "legitimate field" and he had staged it with that lavish disregard for expense and with that keen sense of the artistic which had given him pre-eminence as a producer of light musical entertainment.

Written by one of America's most flamboyant playwrights it told a turgid story of Oriental passion and treachery set against a spectacular background depicting scenes in ancient India. As sheer spectacle it quite transcended anything hitherto attempted in the United States. It presented a series of settings which were so flaming in their color, so permeated with the mystery of the East and so splendid in their suggestion of great size and vast distances that each new revelation was invariably

Fresh Every Hour

greeted with gasps of amazement from the audience. A cast bristling with distinguished names gave versimilitude to the somewhat bombastic dialogue and purely incidental members of the company included a troupe of fifty real nautch-girls, six elephants, five camels and a flock of sheep.

"The Ganges Princess' was not merely the talk of New York. It was literally the talk of the country and its forthcoming tour promised to be one of the most important in the history of the American theatre. It was booked for extended engagements in only a few of the larger cities, there being a comparatively limited number of places containing playhouses with stages large enough to accommodate the production and possessing auditoriums of sufficient size to insure financial success

Bartlett had mapped out a plan of exploitation which was quite the most comprehensive ever undertaken in the annals of press agency. No less than half a dozen advance couriers—the pick of the country—were to devote their energies to the advertising and newspaper campaign alone, while the purely business details were to be intrusted to trained experts who were to have no other duties. This would leave the purveyors of publicity free and untrammelled in their assaults upon the press and a defenseless public.

Jimmy Martin was to be generalissimo, commander-in-chief and field marshal of the combined forces and was to be entrusted with delegated powers such as had never before been given to anyone

Fresh Every Hour

holding a similar position. Matthews had understated the case when he referred to the place as the prize job of the season. It wasn't even comparable. Nothing like it had ever been known for opportunity and power, since the modern variety of press agent came into being. Jimmy realized that himself after Bartlett had finished outlining the scope of the proposed campaign.

"Go to it, my boy," the manager said at the completion of an hour's talk, "and remember that the azure dome of heaven is the limit and that in the bright lexicon of showmanship there are no such words as 'it can't be done.' Do I make myself clear?"

"Absolutely," replied Jimmy cheerfully. "I'm to sit with my feet in a mustard bath and I'm to play my cards without regard to the feelin's, digestions, general state of temperature or politics of anyone else in the game. I'm to see all raises and tilt it one for luck whenever I think the time is ripe for a killin'. Have I got the right combination?"

Bartlett laughed heartily at the flavory idioms which flowed so freely from Jimmy's lips.

"Thou hast, most potent, grave and reverend signor," he replied, bowing low in exaggerated mock courtesy. "By the way," he continued, getting back to business again, "there's another thing I completely forgot. I've engaged a literary chap for a special stunt, and I want you to figure out some way of getting it across so that it seems on the level.

Fresh Every Hour

"The general idea is to have this fellow deliver a series of lectures on India about three weeks ahead of the play date. It'll be a camouflaged boost for the show. Every once in a while he'll make some casual remark about the play which he understands is shortly to be seen in this city, et cetera, but there won't be enough of this stuff for anyone to consider it as being at all out of the way.

"This gentleman will be under your direct and special control. It will be up to you to arrange to have lectures given in every city under the auspices of some literary society or social welfare group or under the patronage of the Daughters of the American Revolution—any kind of a crowd that'll give the stunt prestige and distinction. I've written Mr. Denby to meet you at the theatre this evening."

"Denby, eh? It can't possibly be little old J. Herbert Denby, the highbrow kid, can it?"

"That's the name. Know him?"

A grin of delight spread over Jimmy's features.

"Fairly well," he chuckled. "He tipped me off to a grand idea over in Baltimore a year or so ago. Old George B. Bookworm, eh? If he's still doin' his regular act I've got a lot of laughs comin' to me on this trip. Say, you don't know how good that bird'll be for a stunt of this kind. When it comes to the uplift stuff and the literary bunk he's there in seven separate and distinct languages. And innocent! Say, he could make a two year old baby look like an old offender with a Sing Sing past. They'll fall for him on sight."

Fresh Every Hour

The guileless Mr. Denby greeted Jimmy in the lobby of the Hendrik Hudson that night in his best professorial manner and smiled benignantly through his tortoise shell glasses.

"You will, I think, concede, Mr. Martin," said he, proffering a rather limp hand, "that we give the lie direct to Mr. Kipling."

"Eh? What's that?" mumbled the other. "I don't get you."

Mr. Denby smiled condescendingly and replied in a tone of voice that Jimmy felt to be a bit too irritatingly suave.

"Mr. Kipling—the poet—you know. He says, 'East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet.' Well, we are meeting on a common ground in a common cause and we are—may I venture to suggest—decidedly alien to each other in our thoughts and sympathies, are we not?"

Jimmy eyed him suspiciously before replying.

"Listen, old dear," he said evenly, "I can never quite figure whether you're kiddin' me or not and I'm going to be too busy from now on to ask for diagrams. If we're goin' to get together you've got to get out the little old parachute and jump off into space. In plain English you've got to dive down to earth and keep both feet on the pavement. Save the flossy stuff for your lectures. Are you on?"

"Of course, of course," stammered Mr. Denby. "I meant no offense. I have an unfortunate habit of making poetic allusions. I shall correct it. Be-

Fresh Every Hour

lieve me, my dear Mr. Martin, I shall correct it. I have much to say to you. Where shall we have a little—a little,—shall I say pow-wow—to talk over the—the ah—dope?”

“That’s the idea,” replied Jimmy, slapping the other on the back and laughing heartily. “That’s regular language. Let’s go back to the stage manager’s office and work out a plan of attack.”

The press agent led the way through a passage which ran behind the boxes to the stage and they presently found themselves dodging the canvas walls of a great Indian temple which were being deftly swung into position by a small army of stage hands and picking their steps cautiously through a cluttered array of papier-mache Buddhas, canopied thrones and other properties. Once closeted in the little office in a far corner they began a consultation which lasted for more than an hour.

It was agreed that Jimmy was to travel sufficiently far enough ahead of J. Herbert Denby to arrange for and advertise his lectures and the press agent took pains to carefully instruct the latter as to the best methods of keeping his connection with “The Ganges Princess” company a remote and cherished secret. The subjects chosen by the lecturer were, to say the least, not calculated to arouse any suspicion. Jimmy sat entranced as J. Herbert read them off from a typewritten slip he took from his card-case.

“I shall talk first,” he said, “upon ‘The Rig-Veda—A Primitive Folk Song Embodying the Soul of

Fresh Every Hour

an Ancient People.' I shall follow that with a discourse on 'Brahma, Vishnu and Siva—The Triple Manifestation of the Hindu God' and for my third and final lecture I have chosen perhaps a more popular theme—'Mogul versus Mahratta—A Study in Dynastic Conflicts.' Do you think that program will fill the bill?"

Jimmy was plainly a little bit groggy and he found it difficult to articulate for a moment or two.

"Say, old scout," he finally managed to remark. "I'm almost down for the count. You talk like an encyclopedia. You'll have 'em all pop-eyed when you pull that stuff. The harder it is to understand the harder they'll fall. You're there, George B. Bookworm, you're there. I can see 'em passin' flowers over the footlights already."

J. Herbert, appreciating the sincerity of Jimmy's enthusiastic approval, blushed a little and tried to appear at ease, but it was a difficult task. The two strolled out on the darkened stage and stood in the wings watching the unfolding of the final scene of the second act in which the Maharajah of Rumpore returned unexpectedly, with his followers, from a tiger-hunting expedition to find his favorite wife in the arms of the villainous Begum of Baroda.

They found themselves suddenly wedged in the center of a crowd of male supernumeraries who had come clattering down the stairs leading from the dressing rooms, accoutered in ancient armour and ready for participation in the stirring episode which was to bring the act to a close. Most of

Fresh Every Hour

these "extra people," that being their classification in the world of the theatre, were the usual assortment of shiftless idlers who eke out a precarious existence by doing such odd jobs on the stage and whose Oriental aspect was purely a matter of simulation. There were, however, a number of genuine East Indians among them, random visitors from an alien clime picked up here and there and utilized to give an added air of versimilitude to the ensemble scenes.

One of these latter, a handsome chap under thirty, whose skin was the color of strong coffee diluted with rich cream and whose features had the classic regularity of a Grecian sculptured head, brushed against Jimmy's elbow and apologized profusely.

"I am very much sorry if I have caused myself to discommode you," he murmured, smiling pleasantly and revealing a row of teeth of dazzling whiteness.

"That's all right," replied Jimmy, looking at him in surprise. "You're a regular, I see. You don't belong to the volunteers."

"No, sahib, I am from the East. I am long distance from home-land of my fathers, if that is what you mean."

Jimmy looked at him with new interest. He had an air about him, an indefinable air of distinction that attracted the attention of even the aesthetic J. Herbert Denby, who edged closer and entered the conversation.

"Your English is excellent," he remarked. "You

Fresh Every Hour

have perhaps studied in one of our universities?"

"No, sahib, not here—in Oxford. I have been in this country but a few months. Life has been a difficult problem here in this great democracy, but I am a fatalist, sahib, and I do not make myself uneasiness as to the future. It is useless for it is written already on the scrolls of time."

The next instant he swept forward on to the stage with the others in response to a signal from the stage manager who was peering through a small hole in the scenery.

"My word," said the astonished Mr. Denby. "Fancy a chap like that being content to figure as one of the mob. He has the grand manner of an Indian prince."

Jimmy looked up at him quickly.

"It's moved and seconded that we make him one," he said.

"What's that?"

"All in favor of the motion signify their assent by saying 'Aye.' Aye! Contrary—no. The ayes have it and the motion is carried. What'll we call him?"

"I must confess that I don't grasp the significance of what you mean," said the puzzled Mr. Denby.

"You will," returned Jimmy as he led the way out to the front of the house again. "I'm goin' to give you a little playmate on this trip if I can get Bartlett to go along. Local color stuff. You've slipped me another grand little idea, old man. It's a bear."

Chapter Twenty-Six

Prince Rajput Singh, the mythical only son of the Nazir of Hyderabad, descended on Chicago two weeks later accompanied by J. Herbert Denby, the distinguished authority on Far Eastern affairs. Their arrival at the Senate Hotel just before the dinner hour was a spectacular divertisement, to say the least, and one well calculated to make the unsuspecting general public sit up and take notice.

His Royal Highness wore a great gray cloak when he passed through the main entrance of the hotel flanked on his right by the impeccable Mr. Denby and preceded by two massive and upstanding Hindus whose bearded faces were frozen into a semblance of stoical indifference that was as grim and forbidding as a box-office man's impenetrable and imperturbable mask. On his head he wore a white turban trimmed with golden braid and his feet were encased in richly embroidered red slippers with turned-up toes.

He paused for a moment, surveying with a condescending air the crowd of gaping men which filled the lobby, and then clapped his hands sharply twice. The Hindu attendants moved into position back of him. Another pause and then, with a gesture of surpassing elegance he dropped the cloak

Fresh Every Hour

from his shoulders into their waiting arms. No Roman emperor had ever done it better, Mr. Denby thought to himself. The prince stood revealed in a gorgeous silken robe which was such a shimmering mass of color that it almost made one blink to look at it. Purples, flaming shades of orange and greens which seemed to suggest the rank lush foliage of some tropical jungle were the predominating shades. The robe was admirably designed to set off to the best advantage the dark and finely chiselled features of His Royal Highness, who greeted the manager of the hotel with an air of haughty reserve that was positively imperial in its implications.

His progress through the lobby to the elevator was made amid a silence that Mr. Denby afterwards paradoxically referred to as "audible" and when the clanging doors closed behind him and he was shot up to his quarters on the third floor, the feelings of all the awed onlookers found expression in a concerted gasp.

Jimmy Martin, watching the proceedings from behind the cover of a newspaper which he pretended to be reading while he sprawled over a great leather chair, chuckled quietly to himself and agreed that he was a grand little stage manager. Then he slipped out on to windswept Michigan avenue and walked briskly away to his own hotel. He longed to remain and watch his drama unfold, but discretion warned him that it would be well for him to keep in seclusion for the present, inasmuch as rep-

Fresh Every Hour

representatives of the fourth estate would undoubtedly descend on the hotel shortly in a body.

Prince Rajput Singh graciously received the gentlemen of the press an hour later and discoursed at length upon the past, present and future of India. Hearing that his distinguished friend, the Sahib Denby, whom he had entertained some years ago at his father's palace while the former was traveling in the far east, was planning a lecture tour he had decided, he said, to visit America himself and lend his aid to the project.

"It has been long dream of my existence," he announced grandly, picking his words carefully, "to assist in bringing to new world of the west the culture and wisdom of the east. You have made wonderful discoveries in the world of material things. We have long ago found the secret of the soul. It is well we should make ourselves friends."

The prince posed for flashlight photographs sitting in a great arm chair with his Hindu attendants, arms folded, standing erect and immovable behind him. All in all a pleasant time was had by everyone concerned and the results in the newspapers on the following morning were all that the most optimistic and sanguine publicity promoter could have desired. Two and three column pictures of His Royal Highness were given prominent positions and each interview was tagged with a paragraph announcing the first of Mr. Denby's lectures which was to be given a day later in the grand ballroom of the hotel. The

Fresh Every Hour

prince, it was announced, would supplement the lecturer's remarks with a little talk of his own.

Jimmy Martin, calling on him for the purpose of giving him a few more instructions concerning his general deportment and demeanor on the morrow, was somewhat dazzled by the splendor of his surroundings and by the extent of the apartment assigned to him. There were five rooms in all, overlooking the lake, and there was a canopied bed on a raised platform in one of them as well as other evidences of extreme luxury to which he was not accustomed. He hunted up his friend, the assistant manager of the hotel.

"Say, Wilkins," he said cautiously. "I've been up to see this prince you've got stopping here. That's some set of rooms. I wonder what they're going to set him back."

"That's the royal suite," replied Wilkins. "We don't get much of a chance to get any real royalty very often, and I'm making the old boy a special rate. Mr. Denby arranged for it. We're only going to charge him two hundred dollars a day."

"My God," stammered Jimmy, almost swallowing his cigarette and clutching the other by the arm, "you can't do a thing like that."

The look of hopeless distress on the press agent's face caused the hotel man to laugh uproariously, for a moment, but he checked himself suddenly.

"What's the idea?" he inquired. "Why can't we? You act as if we were going to charge the bill to you."

Fresh Every Hour

"Maybe you are, old man," was Jimmy's response as he led Wilkins over to the latter's little office. "I want to slip you a little side-line of conversation that you've got to promise to keep Masonic."

So it came to pass that in the quiet sanctity of the little office Jimmy outlined certain unpublished details concerning the activities and real mission of Prince Rajput Singh though he said nothing about that dusky gentleman's previous condition of servitude. He represented him as being a genuine Indian nobleman, temporarily down on his luck, who had consented to assist in a carefully contrived and ingenious scheme of indirect advertising.

"Have a heart, old man," he pleaded when he had finished. "If you scale that two hundred down to about—well, say twenty-five and Bartlett'll have heart failure even at that figure—I'll arrange to have his royal niblets have dinner every night in your Egyptian dining room. You know yourself you don't do much trade in there. We'll have those two Hindu birds cook a lot of these curry dishes right there in full view of the audience and wait on him. You'll be able to hang the little old S. R. O. sign out in a couple of days, take it from me."

The assistant manager succumbed to Jimmy's siren song and consented to slash the rate for the royal suite in return for the special performance by the prince and his entourage which the press agent promised to stage nightly.

Mr. J. Herbert Denby and Prince Rajput Singh made their joint debut on the lecture platform on

Fresh Every Hour

the following afternoon before a select and soulful audience largely composed of middle-aged females who hung rapturously on every word uttered by both speakers.

Mr. Denby was in fine form. His discourse on "The Rig-Veda" was as vague and misty as a treatise on the Hegelian philosophy and about as full of real mental nourishment for that particular audience as a scientific monograph on the bony structure of the *dactylopterus volitans* would have been. He soared into the outer void and returned with bay-leaves on his brow and with esoteric phrases dripping from his tongue. The more hopelessly involved he became in the mystic mazes of his metaphysical theme, the more ardent seemed to be the rapt devotion with which his listeners received his remarks. When he finished in one grand, exultant outburst of poetic fervor a hushed silence fell upon the gathering and when a ripple of applause broke in upon it there were those whose brows darkened as if something holy had been profaned.

It remained, however, for the pseudo Prince Rajput Singh to achieve the real sensation of the afternoon. Arrayed in a purple robe and turban of exquisite silk and carrying himself with a careless air of superb distinction that was fascinating to watch, he delivered a brief talk in which he pleaded for a better understanding between the East and the West and urged a study of Indian ways and customs as the best method of bringing such an entente cordiale about, such a study as was rendered pos-

Fresh Every Hour

sible, for instance, by witnessing a performance of a play he had recently seen in New York—was it called "The Ganges Princess?"—he was not sure.

His dark face gleamed with animation as he spoke and his grey eyes sparkled. When he smiled his white teeth flashed brilliantly in the rays of the afternoon sun which poured through the mullioned windows and when he laughed, tossing his head back like some medieval troubadour in rollicking mood, all the impressionable women there present, young and old, went voyaging for a moment or two into the land of romance, and forgotten memory pictures of scenes from the Arabian Nights came trooping back into their several and respective, not to mention respectable, minds.

Taking it by and large Ranjit Lal, former supernumerary, devious adventurer in a foreign clime, and now, by the grace of one James T. Martin, Prince Rajput Singh, was, in the parlance of the boulevards, a knockout. When the formal festivities were over he was surrounded by a chattering swarm of females of assorted ages and subjected to that particular form of obsequious flattery which is usually reserved by the weaker sex for long-haired pianists and corpulent Italian tenors.

Mr. J. Herbert Denby, feeling himself somewhat out of the picture, viewed the proceedings from a short distance away and particularly noticed one worshipper who had edged herself into a position directly in front of his confrere and who seemed to

Fresh Every Hour

be trying to entirely monopolize the swarthy-skinned lion of the occasion.

She was at least fifty. There was no doubting that, though she was dressed, with all the gay abandon of a debutante, in a silken frock which did not quite touch the tops of her extremely high boots. She was also inclined to stoutness, though a straight front corset kept her somewhat ample proportions cabined and confined permitting her to present to the world at large at least a semblance of curvilinear grace. There was, Mr. Denby thought, something decidedly suspicious looking about her flaxen tresses whose symmetrically marcelled regularity was relieved by two little curls which hung coyly in front of each ear. She was, it was plain to see, convinced that she was the living embodiment of Peter Pan, the young person who never grew old.

Mr. Denby could hear her high pitched voice and the gurgling laugh with which she punctuated almost every remark.

"I won't take 'no' for an answer, you dear man," she was saying. "Four thirty tomorrow afternoon in our Indian room — I'll have just a few notables there and I have just one favor to ask of you. Please bring those perfectly dear gentlemen with whiskers along to help serve. They'll help my background? Don't you just love the proper background? It's so stimulating. Oh, yes, background is the most important thing in life, if you grasp what I mean."

Fresh Every Hour

A grunt escaped a tired looking man next Mr. Denby. It was so expressive that the eminent authority on the Far East turned a questioning look on his neighbor.

"Who is she?" he inquired.

"That's Fannie Easton," replied the tired-looking man. "Old maid sister of Junius P. You've heard of him, of course. Oodles of money, houses in Chicago and New York, ranch in California, villa in Florence, three private yachts and not a damned soul to decorate 'em with except that blond nut sundae. Life's a weird thing, sir. Too much for me."

Mr. Denby, forgetting his own isolation for the moment, watched the continuation of the episode with a new interest. He saw the gurgling Miss Easton catch hold of his associate's arm and he observed that the latter was devoting himself to her with assiduous attention as they walked slowly out into the corridor and disappeared, leaving behind a collection of thoroughly disappointed admirers. As the echoes of a silly laugh came floating on the air from some unseen corner of the hallway, something seemed to tell Mr. Denby that all was not well.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Junius P. Easton, popularly known on "the Street" as "old J. P.," was sulking in his tent like a certain ancient Greek, the said tent being the Florentine library in his lake-side home. He was pacing up and down the great sombre room with its tapestried walls and its high raftered ceiling, chewing ferociously on a thick cigar, mumbling incoherently and thinking things utterly unfit for publication. Every two or three minutes he paused at the door opening into the music room and listened to the confused medley of sounds which came to him from an apartment in a far corner of the house—the light laughter of women, the clink of china tea things and the occasional echo of a man's voice, an aggravatingly bland and urbane voice with a trace of a foreign accent in its rythms.

Everytime J. P. caught the sound of that voice his bushy and grizzled eye-brows came together over a deep perpendicular furrow in his forehead and he swore audibly and with gusto. This performance had been going on ever since a quarter to five that afternoon when he had arrived home from his office after a particularly trying day full of perplexing business problems and had been greeted by the butler with the announcement that

Fresh Every Hour

Miss Fannie was entertaining some sort of an Indian prince and a group of friends at tea.

J. P. had tip-toed to the door of the Indian room, had cautiously peeped through the heavy curtain and had been greeted with the spectacle of Prince Rajput Singh, flanked by his be-whiskered servants, lounging luxuriously on a divan completely surrounded by adoring females of uncertain age among whom his more or less revered sister was the central figure. Fannie was running true to form and was successfully monopolizing the attentions of the foreign visitor.

Filled with disgust J. P. had tip-toed away from the scene to the quiet serenity of the library and had begun his imitation of a caged beast of the jungle. It was one of the best things he did and he generally felt himself called upon to perform in this manner two or three times a week for there was no way of every figuring what Fannie was going to do next or who she was going to invite into the house. One afternoon it might be an anarchist preaching the parlor variety of red revolutionary doctrine and the next it was just as likely to be the latest exponent of the simple life, tastefully attired in sandals and a robe made from Turkish towels.

As J. P. remarked once to his closest friend "there's only one thing you can ever be certain about so far as Fannie is concerned—she's always sure to make a damned fool out of herself."

And J. P. spoke by the book. He had lived with

Fresh Every Hour

her for fifty years and he knew whereof he spoke. He was always prepared for anything and yet he was never able to maintain that air of philosophic calm with which he would have liked to have greeted each new ebullition of her tempestuous temperament. He pictured himself sometimes, in moments of reflection, treating her with cold contempt and silent scorn, but when each new issue arose he greeted it with an emotional outburst which was utterly futile in its effect on her, but which gave him some slight measure of satisfaction. A psychologist would have told him that his affection for his sister found expression in that way. We can never be coldly contemptuous of those we love. However, J. P. was no psychologist.

The festivities in the other corner of the house lasted until nearly six o'clock and when the last guest had been given a gushing farewell by the arch Miss Fannie the hostess bounced into the library to meet her brother. She was attired in a short skirted pink silk afternoon gown that looked as if it might have been designed for a sixteen year old high school student, and she flounced into a sofa with an assumption of girlish ingenuousness that was really pathetic to watch.

"I've just had the darlinest afternoon, brother dear," she said gayly, not heeding the glowering aspect of the head of the house, who stood facing her with his hands in his trousers pockets. "We've had the spirit and the mystery of the great, inscrutable East with us and it's been so uplifting and

Fresh Every Hour

so perfectly wonderful that I'm in a daze. I'm sorry you didn't meet the dear prince, brother dear. He's so charmingly soulful and his eyes—well, they're just deep pools of moonlight as some poet said. I'm giving a dinner for him on Friday night. You'll have to come to that, of course."

Junius P. Easton tossed back his head and erupted.

"I'll be damned if I will," he shouted, "and I'll be damned if I'm going to let you hob-nob with this fellow either. I've stood a lot from you Fannie, but there's a limit. I didn't put up much of a holler last winter when you had that greasy Esquimeaux here that evening with that polar explorer and I've stood for Japanese, Chinese, Hawaiians, South Sea Islanders, snake charmers, Bolsheviks, shimmy dancers, poets and short haired female nuts, but I'm going to draw the line on darkies and don't you forget it."

J. P. strode over to a long table, opened a humidor, extracted another cigar and savagely bit the end of it off. His sister was as unruffled as the placid surface of a mountain lake on a hot mid-summer day. She laughed a little before replying. It was such an irritatingly serene sort of a laugh that J. P. winced at the sound of it.

"You poor, dear, foolish man," she said with the patronizing condescension of an indulgent aunt rebuking a fractious boy aged about eight years. "He isn't a colored man. You can be perfectly ridiculous at times."

Fresh Every Hour

"Well, he's the next thing to it, isn't he?" inquired her brother helplessly.

"Don't be absurd, J. P. He is the descendant of kings and potentates and mighty warriors and he's quite the most fascinating man I've ever met. To know him is a privilege. He calls to your soul and bids you voyage with him to the heights where you can leave behind you the petty affairs of life and commune with the eternal and the unknowable."

"Oh, bunk," retorted her brother testily. "You give me a pain. The heights, eh? If you take a trip up there you'd better be sure before you start that you've got a return ticket. You're likely to get all tangled up in the cosmos and the eternal and lose your way as well as your mind. And take a tip from me, old lady. Choose some other companion besides that coffee colored harem keeper if you want to keep your friends."

"My dear brother," returned Miss Fannie, in a perfectly even tone of voice. "I feel extremely sorry for you. You are of the earth earthy. You have no soul. When the infinite calls you cannot hear it. I, fortunately, am so attuned and delicately adjusted that it reaches me, and I can pulsate in harmony with its vibrations. I know because the dear prince told me so. It's just wonderful."

"Oh — piffle," retorted J. P. impotently as he threw up his hands in a gesture of hopeless despair and tore angrily out of the room with the bitter realization that he had once more suffered defeat.

Fresh Every Hour

Miss Fannie Easton smiled indulgently and fondled a jade ring on her left hand, a ring which Prince Rajput Singh had slipped from his own royal finger and given her with the whispered expression of a hope that she would wear it as a token of their friendship. Assuring herself that no one was looking she kissed it long and ardently as something akin to a rapturous look crept into her foolish, lusterless eyes.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Jimmy Martin, couchant on a chaise longue in the royal suite of the Congress Hotel, had difficulty in persuading himself that he was wide awake and in full possession of all his senses. Opposite him sat the pseudo prince Rajput Singh in his shirt-sleeves, looking decidedly unromantic. The East Indian was talking rapidly and the inner import of the tale he was unfolding was of such a nature that Jimmy was aquiver with eager curiosity and aglow with anticipatory delight. He did not notice that the other's eyes glinted unpleasantly as he spoke and that there was something positively repulsive about the smugly complacent manner in which he detailed the progress of his love affair with the wealthy sister of Junius P. Easton. All Jimmy could think of at the moment were the tremendous publicity possibilities inherent in the culmination of this incongruous romance.

"As you see, she is very much head over heels with me," said the prince, smiling mockingly, "is that foolish lady with the yellow hair. I have made a most successful attack on her young affections, eh, Mr. Martin? Is it not so? I have but to bend my small finger and she will do what I ask. I have not made myself waste any time. Do you think I have, Mr. Martin?"

Fresh Every Hour

"Say," said Jimmy enthusiastically, as he rose to a sitting posture, "you're the quickest worker I ever saw in action. A glance of the eye and a twist of the wrist and they're ready to break the old home ties and kiss the pet canary good-bye. You've certainly got winnin' ways. There's no use in denyin' that. When'd you see her last?"

"This afternoon I swear my undying love for this lovely lady in quiet corner of her drawing room. We have made exchange of rings. How much you think this one is worth, eh, Mr. Martin?"

The fictitious heir to the throne of Hydrabad reached into the pocket of his waistcoat and took therefrom a diamond ring which flashed brilliantly as he handed it to the press agent. Jimmy examined it critically.

"Oh," said he carelessly, "this is just a gaudy little trinket that isn't worth more than about fifteen hundred dollars or so. I've got to give you credit. You're immense. Where do we go from here?"

Prince Rajput Singh looked puzzled.

"I do not mean to go," he said. "I mean to stay for a little while."

"Of course, of course," said Jimmy. "You don't understand. What I mean is—what's the next move? You said somethin' a little while ago about the double harness stuff—about marryin' this old gal, I mean. When are we goin' to pull the finale?"

"Whenever we wish, Mr. Martin. I have, as I say, but to bend my small finger. It will make a

Fresh Every Hour

nice publication for you in the journals, will it not?"

"You said somethin' that time, old Frank J. Bombay," returned Jimmy who was now in the grip of one of his moods of exultant exuberance. "This one'll land in places where press agents fear to tread. They'd stop the presses for it, if necessary, and miss the mails. They'd leave out ads for it. And when it's all over you've got to do me a favor. You've got to keep on with your tour and take Mrs. Princess Rajput Singh along with you as a ballyhoo. Why, say, we'll land so much stuff in every town that the agent of every other outfit'll just naturally pack up and move on to the next stand without even leavin' a forwardin' address."

Jimmy's swarthy friend nodded in response to this enthusiastic outburst. Then he narrowed his eyes and the mean, sordid soul of him peered through them as he spoke.

"This Mrs. Princess, as you call her, that is to be," he inquired cautiously, "has really much money in her own name? I have asked many questions from others and I find general opinion that she has. Do you know?"

"Just a few millions, that's all," responded Jimmy nonchalantly. "Just about five or six or somethin' like that. Father left it to her. You're in softer than you realize, you old Hindu son-of-a-gun, you, and you've got to go along on this honey-moon trip I'm plannin'. You owe a whole lot to yours truly, Mister Man. If it wasn't for me you'd be makin' six changes of costume a night for twen-

Fresh Every Hour

ty-five bones a week. Don't forget to remember that."

"Of course I am very much thankful to you, my fine, good friend, most thankful and most very much in favor of your honeymoon plan."

Jimmy arrogated to himself the task of arranging the details of the projected marriage. He fixed upon an elopement to a nearby suburb as being the best method of giving the affair a news slant that would add to the story what are technically known in newspaper circles as "feature values." It would also, he figured, prevent the possibility of any last minute interference by some trouble-making relative.

It was agreed that he was to meet the prospective bride on the morrow in the guise of a close friend of Prince Rajput Singh and was to go over with both parties a detailed plan of campaign which he was to map out in the interim. The prince was to bend his small finger and announce that impetuous and headlong haste was absolutely essential to his peace of soul and was to insist upon the ceremony being performed within twenty-four hours.

When Wilkins, the assistant manager, met Jimmy in the lobby a few minutes after the latter had left the royal suite, he couldn't help noticing the wild exultant light that shone in the press agent's eyes.

"Well, well," he remarked cordially, "you look as if you'd just made a clean-up or something. can't you let me in on the good news."

Fresh Every Hour

"Not for about forty-eight hours," returned Jimmy, "and then I'm goin' to let the whole U. S. A. in on it at the same time. I've got somethin' on the fire that's just about ready to serve that'll make folks everywhere forget to eat their 'ham and' one of these mornin's."

Jimmy permitted Prince Rajput Singh to proceed him by half an hour to the Easton home on the following morning. He thought it would be better to have the blushing bride-to-be apprised of the rough outlines of the elopment plan without the disconcerting presence of an intruder. Mr. J. Herbert Denby, a little disturbed and flustered at being assigned to such a task, was even then arranging with a clergyman in the next county to preside at the marriage which was to take place in the parlor of the rectory and all the other essential details had been carefully worked out.

Jimmy had collaborated with the prince on a telegram which was to be sent by the bridegroom to Junius P. Easton immediately after the ceremony. It would, he felt, give an added touch of the picturesque to the proposed program of events: "Your sister has done me the high honor of becoming my princess," it read, "and all Hyderabad will kneel in proud homage at her feet. I have cabled my revered father for his august blessing. May we not hope that you will shower your honorable good wishes on us."

Fresh Every Hour

The prince and Miss Fannie were in the music room when Jimmy was announced. She had just been singing "Drink to Me Only With Thine Eyes" to her own accompaniment on the piano and she was as radiant as a June morning. She wore a tea gown of baby blue, embroidered with pink rosebuds, and her bleached hair was done up into a billowy cluster of tiny curls which swayed with every movement of her head and which somehow accentuated the essential maturity of her foolish fat face. Jimmy gave an almost audible gasp when he crossed the threshold of the door. He was prepared for the worst, but he had not expected to find himself face to face with a being out of the comic supplement. She ran to meet him, laughing sillily.

"How do you do," she said gayly, extending a pudgy hand. "It isn't necessary for the dear prince to introduce you. He's told me all about you and I know that we're going to be kindred souls. You must vibrate on our plane, you know. I'm certain you must because you are his friend and one's friends always vibrate on one's plane. Don't they, Raijy, dear?"

"Of course, my jasmine bud," replied the prince from the sheltered embrace of a huge arm chair. "Mr. Martin is of our inner circle. He shares the secrets of our hearts, sweet lily. He is my counselor and chosen guide. Let us bid him sup coffee with us which you will pour with your much-to-be adored hands."

Jimmy cast a roving eye in the general direction

Fresh Every Hour

of his dark-skinned fellow conspirator and was greeted by the latter with an expressive wink, which was not visible to Miss Fannie, who was bustling about a silver tray on which was a pot of steaming coffee. She poured and served it with a fluttering air of heavy coquetry which irritated the press agent beyond measure and which made him feel decidedly uncomfortable. She was such a simple, trusting, foolish soul that he didn't have the heart to enlarge upon the merits of the bridegroom-to-be in the expansive and flowery fashion he had decided upon on the way from the hotel. He remained strangely silent for a time listening to an exchange of preposterous love words between this oddly assorted and incongruous pair and wishing himself a long distance away.

"And when shall we visit dear Hyderabad, Rajjy?" Miss Easton was saying. "I can see myself under a silken awning by the shores of the little lake you spoke of—the lake by your summer palace I mean, and I can see you beside me and the native servants are salaaming and serving us with a wonderful feast. We must go there at once, Rajjy dear, at once. My soul cries out for the sound of those 'tinkly temple bells' that Kipling wrote about. It just cries out for them.

Prince Rajput Singh stirred uneasily in his chair and leaned forward.

"In time, sweet nightingale," he said suavely. "I must make a continuation of my lectures and then I must visit your wonderful California. It will

Fresh Every Hour

please me to be your honored guest at your home there. Then, when we have tired of the sunshine and the flowers we shall make long journey to my home-land. The spell of this new country is on me and until it passes I must remain here. Besides, I must await a salutation from my father. That breach must be healed, fair bul-bul."

Miss Fannie sighed resignedly.

"Whatever you say, Rajjy dear," she said. "You shall stay in California as long as you wish and I'll write to that father of yours if you don't hear from him. I think it's terrible the way the Nazir is treating the prince, don't you, Mr. Martin?"

The bridegroom-to-be coughed nervously and rose quickly from his chair, breaking into the conversation before Jimmy could stammer a reply.

"Fair one," he said, gripping her by the arm, "my friend tires of these much repeated references to my own poor self. We have more important matters to discuss. Let us make busy with them."

Thus pressed, Jimmy enlarged upon the detailed arrangements which he had completed for the exciting events of the following day, arrangements which included provisions for everything from the marriage license to the formal and ceremonious delivery to all the newspaper offices of elaborately engraved announcement cards by the Hindu attendants of Prince Rajput Singh. Miss Fannie gushed her approval of the program and was positively gurgling with delight as she escorted him to the door.

Fresh Every Hour

"The prince is so proud," she said, when she was out of ear-shot of that dignitary, "that he can't bear to have me say anything about the perfectly outrageous way in which he has been treated by his father. I think it's perfectly scandalous, don't you?"

"I'm not very clear about it myself," returned the press agent guardedly. "What'd the old gink—I mean the old man do?"

"Oh, dear, I thought you knew. Why, he cut off his allowance for a perfectly trivial something or other—he's never told me exactly—and here he was on the verge of being unable to keep up appearances and the dignity of his station. It must have been most humiliating. Poor Rajju cried when I forced it out of him. He'd been so depressed that I knew something must be the matter, and I just made him tell me. I was so glad to help."

Jimmy cocked his head at the last sentence and looked up at her quickly.

"So you helped him, eh?" he inquired.

"Just a little," she replied. "What are a few thousand dollars if they will bring peace to a troubled spirit? Peace is everything, Mr. Martin, quite everything worth while. And I'm going to keep the poor, dear prince peaceful for ever and always and aye. Good-bye, dear Mr. Martin. I'll see you in the morning."

Jimmy went down the gravel path in a thoughtful mood. Somehow he felt rather fed up with Prince Rajput Singh.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Mr. J. Herbert Denby, between sips of his morning coffee next day in a secluded corner of the breakfast room of his hotel, was reading for the second time, with an inner glow of satisfaction, a letter which he had just received. It was a brief communication from Chester Bartlett complimenting him upon his success as a lecturer and announcing the manager's forthcoming arrival in Chicago that very morning.

"I can't resist the temptation," Bartlett wrote, "to look in on one of your seances and catch His Royal Highness and yourself in action. I must congratulate you on the success which you have achieved in putting this stunt over on the natives and I have instructed the office to give you a twenty-five per cent increase in salary."

Mr. Denby laid the letter down and decided that, after all, theatrical managers had their proper place in the scheme of existence. Up to that moment he had always been inclined to consider them as useless encumberers of the earth.

He picked up the morning paper which lay at his elbow, adjusted his glasses and turned to the front page. He glanced cursorily at a story in the left-hand column dealing with the newest series of what are technically known in newspaper circles as "Red Raids;" let his attention wander to an account of the launching of a new presidential boom

Fresh Every Hour

and then took a look at the right hand corner. What he saw emblazoned there caused him to almost drop the cup which he had just daintily raised to his lips and provoked an audible spluttering that sent the head-waiter hurrying in his direction from the other side of the room.

"Anything wrong, sir?" deferentially inquired the chief servitor, noting with apprehension the startled mien of the eminent lecturer.

Mr. Denby tried to compose himself.

"Nothing important," he managed to reply. "Just some unwelcome tidings from home. I'll be all right in a moment or two."

When the head-waiter had bowed himself away Mr. Denby turned to a perusal of the paper. The words which struck his eyes seemed to spell to him the collapse of all things temporal.

PRINCE BAMBOOZLES SOCIETY; RAJPUT SINGH PROVED RANK IMPOSTER

**Alleged Son of Nazir of Hyderabad
and Glib Tongued Lecturer
Associate Revealed as Wily
Promoters of Publicity for
Theatrical Enterprise.**

**FAKIRS ALMOST GOT
AWAY WITH IT**

Fresh Every Hour

The harrowing details which followed were dressed up in such sarcastic verbiage that Mr. Denby's soul went sick and his appetite for breakfast vanished. He paid his check and sought the seclusion of his room. He wished to hide his face from the public gaze and apply poultices to his wounded dignity.

Jimmy Martin, coming up unannounced, found him a half hour later gazing pensively out of the window—a picture of incarnate misery. Jimmy wasn't in a particularly jaunty mood himself, but he assumed his best "cheery-oh" manner when he caught a glimpse of his associate's face.

"What's the matter, little song-bird?" he inquired breezily. "You look about as lonely as a bartender."

Mr. Denby turned a pair of ineffably sad eyes on the press agent and sighed mournfully.

"I'm disgraced, Mr. Martin," he said feebly, "irretrievably disgraced. I should never have gone into this masquerade—never. My saner judgment should have prevailed. I shall never recover from this. I'm the most miserable man in Chicago this morning—the most utterly miserable."

"You've got another think coming, old popsy-wop," replied Jimmy. "I've just seen his royal highness. You're a care-free babe in arms compared to that bird. He's passin' on to New York on the twelve forty."

"What I can't understand," said Mr. Denby, "is how the story got out. Have you any idea?"

Fresh Every Hour

"Yes, I have," replied the press agent, slowly. "As a matter of fact I gave it out myself."

"You gave it out yourself," stammered the bewildered Mr. Denby. "I—I don't understand. Why did you do such a thing as that?"

"Well, the low-down of it is that I had to. I was out to that Easton dame's house yesterday afternoon with his royal jiblets and when I saw the way the poor nut was makin' a fool out of herself over that little brown brother it just made me sick. He'd been milkin' her for thousands and I could see he was layin' lines to wish himself into an easy life at her expense. She's a good-natured old gal, too, but she'd fallen for him so hard that she'd have believed him if he told her he was that Buddha party come back to earth for a little holiday.

"She told me about some fairy tale or other he'd pulled—something about a row with his father and how his allowance had been stopped and so forth and so on and when I took one last look at her at the front door and thought of that baby lollin' around on sofas and lettin' her wait on him and callin' her a lot of flossy names so's to keep his stock up I didn't have the heart to let her go through with the marriage thing, story or no story. Somethin' sort of caught hold of me and wouldn't let me go on. I wonder what it was?"

"Some philosophers call it the categorical imperative," replied Mr. Denby, thoughtfully.

"They do, eh? Well, maybe that's a good name for it, but I've got a kind of a hunch that it was

Fresh Every Hour

the little old Golden Rule that made me ashamed of myself. I thought the best of cramp Rajjy's style would be to get word to that brother of the blushin' bride so I got in to see him last night and coughed up everything. He's a fine fellow. They don't grow 'em better. He was mighty grateful, but he said it wouldn't do any good for him to say anything to her. He figured that would make it worse. He said she wouldn't believe him. The only thing that'd get to her, he said, would be to have some paper expose his royal job-lots and make him ridiculous in the eyes of all her friends.

"So I came down town and slipped an ear-full to Cunningham, a friend of mine on the Times, and he did the rest. I'm sorry, old boy, but I just couldn't help it. It'd a been one of the best stories ever put over if we'd let it go through and it puts the kibosh on the lecture tour, but there just naturally wasn't anythin' else to do. Women and children first, as they say when the ship hits an iceberg. Am I right?"

Mr. Denby sprang up and grasped Jimmy by the hand.

"You certainly are," he said enthusiastically. "I feel better already. I'm sure Mr. Bartlett will understand. Did you know he was coming to town today?"

"I did not," returned Jimmy. "That's a good exit cue, though. I haven't the nerve to face him until this thing kind of blows over. I'll duck under cover for twenty-four hours and let you break the

Fresh Every Hour

news to mother. Slip him the real inside stuff. Maybe he'll fall for it."

Chester Bartlett was the maddest man in the entire state of Illinois when he read the story of the expose on the incoming train to Chicago that morning and the quips which were hurled at him by dozens of his friends in his club at luncheon gave substance and solidity to his rage. His interview with Mr. Denby was a stormy affair and his reaction to what Jimmy termed the "real inside stuff" was violent in the extreme. While still in the throes of his anger he wrote a brief message to the press agent which the erstwhile lecturer on far eastern affairs was requested to deliver in person to his friend.

Mr. Denby found Jimmy at his hotel immersed in the preparation of advertising copy. He looked up hopefully. Mr. Denby handed him the note in silence and he tore it open with a foreboding of disaster.

"No man can make me ridiculous and remain in my employ," it ran. "You're through the moment you receive this. You should never have encouraged such an affair as the romance Denby tells me about. As a matter of fact it was a foolhardy thing to try and palm that fellow off as a prince. You might have known you'd come a cropper sooner or later. You've got too many ideas for your own good and I'll be satisfied to go along hereafter with someone who's perhaps a little shy

Fresh Every Hour

on brilliancy, but who's long on balance."

"Can you beat 'em," inquired Jimmy, helplessly. "They're all alike. No matter what you do you're always in wrong."

The telephone bell rang just then and he barked a rude "hello" into the transmitter. The voice at the other end was hearty and good-natured.

"Is that Mr. Martin—Mr. James T. Martin?—this is Easton talking—Easton—Junius P. Easton—thought I'd let you know that my sister is cured—can't begin to thank you for what you did—tried to reciprocate this morning—told my brokers to carry a thousand shares of Consolidated Gutta Percha in your name—closed out at a quarter to three—ten point rise—you'll get the check in the morning—had a little inside information, you know—did pretty well myself, too—say, you impress me as being a pretty clever sort of a lad—ever think of going into business on your own?—it's the only game—why work for anyone?—think it over."

Jimmy was still mumbling his thanks when the other excused himself and hung up. Mr. Denby, who hadn't grasped the import of the telephonic conversation, betrayed an intense interest in the proceedings.

"What's up?" he questioned.

"Consolidated Gutta Percha," replied Jimmy. "Want a job?"

"You know I do. Who with?"

"Why with me, of course, you old highbrow. And look here. Don't you go palmin' off any fake dukes

Fresh Every Hour

or rajahs or anythin' like that. If you do you'll get the bum's rush and I won't take the trouble to write you a letter about it, either."

Mr. Denby raised a deprecatory hand.

"I'll promise to be good," he said, "but may I be permitted to ask another question?"

"Shoot—while the shootin's good."

"Well, then, in the parlance of the theatrical profession—with which, I take it, we are still to be identified—'where do we go from here?'"

Jimmy pulled a pink letter out of an inside pocket and proffered it to his friend with a flourish.

"Cedar Rapids is our next stand, you old adjective hound," he said heartily. "Take a look at this little message."

It was, Mr. Denby found, a note from Lolita Murphy and it contained a contrite plea for forgiveness for her abrupt departure from Boston many weeks before and a hope that the diplomatic relations then severed might be renewed.

"Old Mr. Higgins," she wrote, "wants someone to take the lease of the Opera House off his hands. He's had a cataract on his left eye for two years, and now he's got rheumatism in his right hip and he wants to go out to California. He's been doing great business this season and on the nights when he hasn't had regular shows he's been putting on big extra special feature films and packing people in. I thought maybe you'd like to try your hand at settling down and running a theatre. Of course, Main Street isn't Broadway, but I like it lots bet-

Fresh Every Hour

ter and maybe you could learn to, too. It means home folks to me. Maybe it might come to mean the same thing to you—some time.”

Mr. Denby gasped when he read this. When he tried to talk the words did not come trippingly...

“You mean you’re going to—to—run the opera house in Cedar Rapids?”

Jimmy grabbed him by the shoulders and shook him in an outburst of fierce joviality.

“I mean that *we’re* going to run it,” he said. “All *three* of us. What do you think about smearing a catch-line all over town — ‘A Homey Theatre for Home Folks’? I’ve got an idea that’d make a hit with a Certain Party.”

THE END

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